SIDELIGHTS ON THE TANTRA

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Publishers:
DIPTI Publications,
Sri Aurobindo Ashram,
Pondicherry - 2

1971

Price: Rs. 3/-

Printed at
Sree Ramaprasad Press
56, Broadway, Madras - 1

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This collection brings together Sastriar's writings on the Tantra originally published on different occasions in various journals.

M. P. P.

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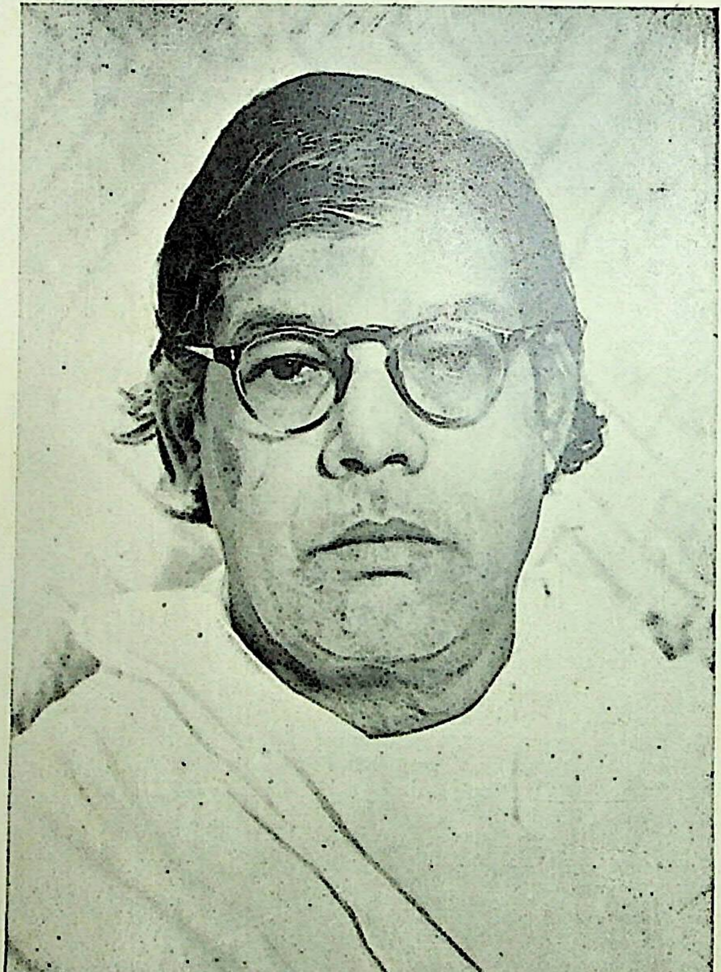

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SIDELIGHTS ON TANTRA

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In this brief study we shall make an attempt to appreciate the basic principles that underlie the Agamas, generally called Tantra Shastra. We shall make a general reference to their relation to the Vedic and Vedantic schools of philosophic thought and spiritual discipline. We shall take note of the salient features and evaluate, in the light of Sri Aurobindo's teachings, the part they have played in the past which has trickled down to the current times. When we look upon the past of India, upon the lines of her cultural history in its meandering course, with all the vicissitudes of such a long life that has few parallels elsewhere, we are struck by a consistent note. It is a note that permeates every successive attempt to revive the ancient spirit and restate in the language and form suited to the conditions of the age the high ideals, the subtle ideas and sublime truths perceived and worked out by the early builders of Indian society in its infancy as well as in its adolescence. What is this perpetual note that arrests our attention? Certainly, it is the presence of a large synthesis conceived and worked out first by the ancient architects of society, the seers and sages of the Vedic Age and later in its decline taken up by the revivalist attempts of the Brahmanas and the Upanishads. Nowhere is this spirit and vision of synthesis so open and exacting as in the teachings of the Gita which heals up the hiatus or the apparent gulf of the intermediate ages and builds a comprehensive system having for its basis the spirit of the Veda and the substance of the Vedanta, takes up all the accumulated knowledge of the past, assimilates the essentials into the body and spirit of its instructions, and presents a really grand synthesis not as a metaphysical system but as a comprehensive teaching for application under all conditions of life.

But there has been all along another distinctive Synthesis embodied in the teachings of Agamas which, while professing general allegiance to the Vedic systems of philosophy and thought and spiritual discipline, is apparently different in its method of approach and is comprehensive, all-inclusive in its spirit, devoid of the exclusiveness associated with all the religious schools and rituals based upon the Smritis and Shrutis of Vedic ceremonialism. It is difficult to plumb exactly into their origins, much less to find the precise period of the beginnings of their teachings, though the extant works of the Agamas can be traced to approximate periods of India's history. For we must note that the substance of the teachings may have and certainly has come from early ages, though the written texts may have appeared later on at different times which may be ascertained with less difficulty. Let us first be sure of the sense in which the term Agama is used and came, to be called Tantra and then proceed with the main principles of the framework of the Agamas in general and the Shakta Tantras in particular.

In dealing with the purposes of the study of *vyākaraṇa* Sanskrit Grammar, Patanjali uses the word Agama in the sense of Veda or Vedic knowledge; and in the Yoga Sutras he speaks of three criteria of knowledge—Perception (*pratyakṣa*), Inference (*anumāna*), and Revelation or authentic utterance (*āgama*). Thus we find that because all sacred scriptures were considered to be revealed the Veda was termed Agama; and when another class of literature, viz., Tantra, scriptural in import, appeared and began to hold sway over a vast mass of people, the term Nigama was

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applied to Veda while Agama though not exclusively but generally came to denote Tantra on the one hand and ensure its sanctity like the Veda on the other. Now it is well-known that the Rishis of the Veda are not authors of the Veda but seers of the Mantra while the Veda is understood to be eternal even as the Divine Wisdom that is embodied in it. The Agamas, whoever may be their writers and whatever their dates be, are held to be essentially Scriptures revealed by the Supreme Shiva or Hari according to the nature and class of the Agamas concerned.[1] Let us leave aside for consideration the Bauddha and Jaina Agamas which openly

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[1] The dates of the extant Agamas even when they are settled with certainty do not at all mean that the teachings they embody came to birth along with the books. It is necessary to strike a note of caution on this point in view of the current beliefs among a section of the educated classes, Indian and Western, that the Agamas were later inventions or scriptural adjustments wrought by the endeavours of later writers. Shiva-worship side by side with the Vishnu-worship was current in the Southern (Tamil) India as early as the first and second century of the Christian Era as is evidenced in the sacred poems of Nayanmars, Shaiva Saints and the Prabandhams of Alwars, Vaishnava Saints, whose times extend from the 2nd to the 8th century. Not only worship, but references to Agamas are frequent therein. In the North, the Besnagar Pillar Inscription of the 2nd century B.C. bears clear testimony to Vishnu worship in temples. The Inscription records the erection of Garuda Pillar in the temple of Vasudeva and indicates thereby that that worship had been accepted by a foreign Greek ambassador from Taxila.

That the major Puranas and the main Agamas of Shaiva and Vaishnava persuasion were written and completed by the end of the Gupta period is admitted on all hands by students of history. But Vasudeva worship is referred to by Panini whose time is at least some four centuries before Christ. Thus it is wrong to deduce from the available texts that the teachings themselves started with these books. It is quite possible that Shiva worship was a feature of the Indus disclaim any Vedic authority and purport in fact to oppose and supplant the ancient tradition, and we have the Vaishnava, the Shaiva and the Shakta Agamas. The Vaishnava Agamas look upon Vishnu as the Supreme and other gods and goddesses his aides; so do the Shaiva Agamas assign the highest position to Shiva. The Shakta Agamas too claim the most superior position for the Goddess in practice.[2] But in theory She is not put above Vishnu or Shiva. She is indeed the Creatrix of the Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra—the Mother of the Universe. But She is also acclaimed as the Yoga-Maya of Vishnu as in Chandi Saptashati or as in other texts the Para Shakti, the Supreme Consort of Shiva. There is another notable difference between the Shakta and the other two classes of Agamas. For while the Shaiva and Vaishnava Agamas continue and preserve the Vedic tradition of confining their knowledge and application only to the four Varnas with some restraint, the Shakta declares in a more liberal spirit that it is for all people irrespective of their Varna. It is the scripture of the common man. All the Agamas are also known as the Tantra Shastra. Tantra in Sanskrit has many meanings; but the one significance of relevance to us here is *act*. Act—and

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Valley Civilisation and the recent researches based upon the excavations throw some light on prehistoric India and have given shock to the accepted notions of historians in regard to stories of Ancient India.

[2] We must note that this was a radical departure from the Vedantic tradition. For while the tradition looked upon the Purusha as the Lord of all and the One Substratum of All, the Shakta Agama i.e. Tantra increasingly looked to the Energy aspect of the Supreme, to the Prakriti in effect and this departure was responsible, as pointed out by Sri Aurobindo, for the later loss of its purity of intention in the mechanism of its means.

ritual is an act—is the one characteristic common to all the Agamas and hence they have come to be known as the Tantra Shastra.

A striking feature common to these Agamas is the high reverence in which they hold the Vedas. They do not, as is imagined by many, run counter to the spirit of the Veda. On the contrary, they declare that the knowledge in the Veda is high, beyond the reach of common men and claim to hold in themselves the substance and essence of the supreme knowledge embedded in that Scripture. And indeed it is so. For while the Upanishads represent the revivalist attempts for the recovery of the Jnana portions of the Vedas, the practical side of the Vedic teaching, not as related to the Ritual—for that was the care of the Brahmanas—but as concerning the inner life of the seeker, the esoteric teaching as we would put it, was sought to be revived, continued and preserved by these later Yogas and Tantras. As Sri Aurobindo observes: "......The mental images of the Vedic gods figured in the mantras (were replaced) by mental forms of the two great deities, Vishnu and Shiva, and their Shaktis and by corresponding physical images which are made the basis both for external worship and for the Mantras of inward adoration and meditation, while the psychic and spiritual experience which the inner sense of the Vedic hymns expresses finally disappeared into the psycho-spiritual experience of Puranic and Tantric religion and Yoga." Such knowledge as this—of the building of the inner life—was traditionally handed down from father to son, from Guru to Shishya and the Agamas represent a worthy compilation and preservation of this inheritance from the forefathers. There are many traces of the Vedic influence and outlook in these Agamas. There is, for instance, a monotheism in them. It is now Shiva, now Vishnu or Hari who is the Supreme. There is also, as in the

Rig Veda, an apparent polytheism. For many are the deities worshipped and invoked by the aspirant—though their position is one of subordination to, and ultimately identity with the Supreme. There is even a tendency to Monism perceptible in the Shakta scriptures. The devotee worships the Deity and finds his glorious culmination in the final act of complete identification and merging in the Higher—eliminating all difference between worshipper and the worshipped.

But these Agamas are not a mere conglomeration of various systems of teachings and past traditions. They work up a large synthesis instead. And synthesis is no collection or heaping up of diverse elements; it is not eclecticism either. The synthesis we meet with in the Agamas is a living whole in which every element of value is preserved and falls into its just position and proportion—all together making quite a new and developing system which embraces the entire life in its sweep, the man in the individual and man in the aggregate, man the thinker and the doer, man the soul. This synthesis of the Tantra is in fact more comprehensive than the synthesis of the Gita and in a sense more in consonance with the Intention in life. For the ultimate teaching of the Gita comes to this: action is unavoidable, none can subsist without it. So make the best of it, use it—such of it as allows to be so used—first of all for your own moral and spiritual elevation leading to a progressive surrender to the Lord of all so that once you are completely given to Him you may have nothing more to do with this transitory and unhappy world, even though you may continue to do work for the sake of others. Life is a lever for rising upwards and shooting beyond it, not a field to be worked upon and cherished as an enjoyable creation of the Divine Being. The Tantric synthesis however looks upon life with a different and other vision. There is nothing to be rejected from what the Supreme Shakti has created. Even that which the Gita enjoins upon all seekers to reject, the *bhoga*, need not be given up. After all the world is for the *bhoga* of the Ishwara or the Ishwari and man at his highest, representing as he does an effective portion of Him or Her must enjoy the *bhoga*, conscious of his part as the vehicle or centre of the Enjoyer. That this *bhoga-mārga*, Vamamarga as it is called, later fell into disrepute and degeneracy is quite another matter which could be easily explained and does not detract from the sublime conception at the base, the high standard of purity and sincerity that was expected of man if he was to discharge conscientiously his responsibility as an unsullied channel of the Joy of *bhoga*. It means a tremendous labour of discipline and self-exceeding, in one's own personal and inner, and the outer and collective life—a continuous action, *tantra*, on so many planes.

Let us now turn to a closer view of the Tantric system and scrutinise the four famous parts, *pāda*—which go to make up the whole. Every way of religious and spiritual life has a basis to stand upon, a metaphysical base providing the philosophical Truths underlying the system, its genesis, rationale, the aim. In fact it is the strength and validity of this source of inspiration that determine the course and power of the outflowing manifestation. A systematised presentation in intellectual terms of the underlying Idea, a rational working out of its ways and means of expression, an examination of its fundamentals—in the premises and in the conclusions—*vis à vis* other prevailing Idea-truths, is what we would call the metaphysical basis of a system and the Tantra Shastra has doubtless a philosophy, a metaphysics of its own. If the esoteric message of the Vedas is the substance of its practical teaching, the Vedanta with the Sankhya in a modified form provides the back-ground, we may say, even the backbone of the philosophy of the Tantra. The Supreme is One and All is He. Only there it is Brahman, here it is Vishnu, Shiva or Shakti. The psychology of the Tantra is the psychology of the Sankhyas which itself is a side-product of the Upanishadic thought. These teachings are developed and extended so as to apply to a larger and larger part of man; the emphasis is sought to be shifted from the soul and mind to the other parts of the being, the heart and emotions and the will as well. In fact it is a restatement of the Wisdom of the Upanishads in terms suited to the changing conditions in which society was passing with varying stresses on the different elements that go to make up the complex personality of man. But this Knowledge-part, *jnāna-pāda*, could not be all. At best it can provide a satisfying and even a compelling understanding of the aim and purpose of life. Beyond that it has to put it into action. And the Tantra has the second *pāda*, the *yoga-pāda* for the purpose.

It is certainly not that Yoga was born with the Agamas or the Tantriks or that there were no Yogins before they came. It cannot be said either that even Raja Yoga was first propounded by Patanjali. The truth is that Yoga is as old as the Vedas at least and the Institution of Sacrifice, *yajna*, in the Vedas is just a symbol of the one Yoga in which the Rishis were ceaselessly engaged, the Yoga by which they endeavoured, invoked and received in themselves the gods from high on. In the very nature of things there was no set uniformity in every detail of the individual pursuits of the Yoga though in large outlines they always corresponded. Handed down by tradition for centuries, it was perhaps Patanjali who first picked up one line of Yoga, and methodised the system of Raja Yoga in his famous Sutras. But Tantric Yoga goes beyond that, it infuses an inner discipline on the lines marked out by the Guru to the disciple. Life is sought to be purified, uplifted and equipped for effective embodiment and living the truths in accordance with the principles laid out in *jnāna-pāda*.

The Tantra Shastra does not stop with the individual. It recognises that for all purposes man is but a member of the larger society around. He influences those around and is influenced by their movements, by their thoughts, aspirations and actions to a greater extent than he normally affects the aggregate. It is not enough to educate and develop one unit. It is indispensable to mould the general environment also on the same lines so that there could be an identity of aspiration, a mutually helpful and congenial intercourse between the individual and the collective. It recognises also that human mind in the mass is less attracted to the abstract and the subtle and goes on to provide significant rituals and ceremonies by which it could be gradually drawn to the inner truth of things. This is the *kriyā-pāda*. External ceremonies, ritual worship have played a notable part in the awakening of the naturally extrovert consciousness of man to the reality of an Inner Presence; they impinge upon the senses and sense-faculties of man with considerable force and leave impressions which in their cumulative result effect an opening through some part into the larger being of himself. Effort at such social and collective religious practices is encouraged. Congregational worship has a stimulating effect and power of invocation not generally realised by most. The atmosphere created by the pressure of a single Idea, a single mounting aspiration in a multitude of hearts simultaneously striving for the same end gets charged with a force and intensity which the individuals share, consciously or unconsciously, each benefitting by the all, each individual aspiration and realisation contributing to the general but also absorbing and growing on the strength and nourishment received from the total and the general. It is in this light that the elaborate ritual-cum-worship aspect of the Tantra is to be examined. This aspect of the Tantra bears a close resemblance to and recalls the Ritual of the Brahmanas, the Yajna of the Veda. There is no more the full figure of the Yajna; yet an important ritual in the construction of Temple and the installation of the Idol is the *kumbhābhiṣeka*, considered to be a *yāga*. Thus even the tradition of the old ritual ceremony is absorbed and carried forward in a newer form.

And this is not all. The seeker is given a philosophy with which he equips himself intellectually; he is initiated into a Yoga that could yield the truth of the philosophy for his living; he is provided with an environment and an outer scaffolding suited to the growth and outflowering of his faith and realisation. But the spiritual effort, fostered and built up with such an all-round care and eye for detail, is not meant to be bottled up in its results within the limits of the individual frame. Liberation of the soul from the bonds of the lower Prakriti and a release into the heights of the Spirit does not form the end of such a comprehensive endeavour. The ideal individual of the Tantric Yoga has a responsibility to others less fortunate than himself, he is looked upon as a *siddha*, a perfect individual for the outpouring of the Shakti he is in communion with. He has to have dealings with men and society, he has to discharge all the responsibilities that devolve on him by virtue of the pre-eminent position he has attained, not without some help from the society. He has to guide and lead others. The Shastra lays down the code of conduct, the ways of functioning—the *caryā*—for these mentors of men. Relations and activities of men on the spiritual path are governed

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by rules and modes of conduct other than those that are prescribed by the Dharma of the age for the laity. That is because their thoughts and their actions proceed from a different basis; they have another motive-force and other ends in view. Their attitude to life, their out-look on the world, is different from that of common humanity and things do not appear to them in the same hue and light in which they do to others. As a rule man looks only at the surface of things, thinks—when he does at all—with an insufficient faculty called mind—and proceeds as best as he could. But one who has effected a change in his make-up by dint of *tapasyā* and stationed himself on a deeper basis, necessarily governs his life-movement with different considerations which may at times strike the convention-ridden mind as opposed to reason or morality even as the actions of an adult human being may well appear to be harsh, cruel and stupid—when they are really otherwise—to an infant. The Tantra Shastra recognises and provides for the need of such a higher type of being to proceed from different basis of action in the fourth *pāda*, the *caryā-pāda* and enjoins upon him to work out the progressive weal of the rest. Mark the three ways of worship of the Tantriks: the godly way, *divya bhāva*, the way of the hero, *vira bhāva*, and that of the animal, *paśu bhāva*, which alone is governed by the ordinary stereotyped rules of conduct.

This in brief is the rationale of the four Padas of the Tantra, the Jnana-pada, Yoga-pada, Kriya-pada and Charya-pada. A Tantra is whole and complete only when it has these four parts. We can now better appreciate the large spirit that has actuated the Tantric sages. But no human institution fashioned by human hands in Time is known to have escaped the decay and disease inevitable with the wear of age and the Tantric system has been no exception. And we need not be surprised when we find votaries of Tantra attaching exclusive importance to the externals of the cult, to the minutiae and formulae, totally forgetful of the original intention of the system-builders. Thus when it is asserted that what is of utmost importance in the Kriya-pada is strict observance, to the very letter, of the requirements in measurement and design in the construction of the temple and performance of the ritual or when it is sought to enforce uniform rules for all relating to details of daily life as all-sufficing commandments of the Charya-pada, one can only smile if one has enough detachment or sigh at human stupidity which competes with the march of ages in pulling down lofty structures of the ancients.

Before concluding this section on the Tantric synthesis we cannot resist the temptation of drawing attention to the parallel between this and the New Synthesis, the synthesis worked out in the Teachings of Sri Aurobindo. Not that this our system has been modelled after the Tantric, though it is true that the Tantric truths have gone into the making of it even as the Vedantic conceptions have. But they do not, by any means, form the prototypes; they are important elements; we will not go into the question further for the moment but only point out an interesting correspondence between the Tantric-Quartette and the Quartette of writings Sri Aurobindo found necessary to broad-base his vast system, for Metaphysics and Philosophy, for the realisation of the fundamental truths in one's being, for the development of social psychology in consonance with the principles enunciated and finally for the actual working out of the Unity of man.

II

It is not accurate to describe this ancient religion of India, now current, as Puranic. Neither the Gods of the current religion nor the metaphysics and philosophy—Shastra—are really Puranic in origin. The Puranas are compilations of the legendary lore of the country, giving different accounts of the cosmogony of the universe – accounts of the primary creation, the secondary creation, narrations of the geneology of the progenitors of mankind, cycles of time, rolls of the dynasties of kings, etc.—*purāṇam panca-lakṣaṇam.* The Puranas are more historical—if history they can be called—interspersed with philosophical or religious stories for the mental and moral elevation of man and society. The Gods of the Hindu religion are in fact Tantric Gods. And the Gods of the Tantra are not sudden arrivals on the scene. They are really a continuation of the line of the Gods of the Veda. Not in the same form and name, of course, but with necessary modifications inevitable with the incidence of Time on tradition.

The Vedic Gods, as we have noted elsewhere while dealing with the subject in fuller detail, have a twofold aspect to the seers of the Veda. In their exterior aspect they are essentially Nature-powers. Agni is the elemental fire, Indra the rain-god, Surya the solar body, Maruts the storm-gods and so on. But they have another, psychological character also and this was more important to those initiated into the mystery of the Vedic religion. These Gods are powers indeed, but not merely the powers of Nature. They are rather higher Powers, Personalities of the Godhead having the Cosmic field for their action. There are also lower gods who preside over the elemental forces of nature, over movements in the physical world and also movements in the inner world of man.

Besides presiding over the Fire element in creation, Agni is looked upon as the deity controlling and promoting the upward flame, the *agni* in man stationed on the various levels of his being—as the *agni* in life, *prāṇa-agni*, as the flame of aspiration in the heart, as the consuming quest for knowledge in the mind. He has other functions also. Similarly, Indra is the God governing the higher regions of the luminous mind, the Maruts controlling and contributing to the life-forces and thought-powers of man. Thus the Gods are Cosmic Powers with specific functions in the external world of Nature as well as with more important and significant charge in the inner world that supports it from behind and above. The sages of the Tantras carried on the tradition in the essentials that mattered. The Gods are very much the same here also, only the external functions in their physical aspect which predominate in the common mind of the early times have been appropriately relegated to the background when they are not altogether dispensed with. Thus Agni of the Veda continues in the Tantra, with a change of name certainly, yet with the same functions and even the new name, Kumara, Child, is significant for the Agni-origin it preserves. Agni is Kumara, Child of the Supreme Shiva. In the Rig Veda Agni is in the forefront of the Gods, their guide, their messenger. Here he is their Chief of Powers who leads them to victory, the commander behind whom they line up. In the Veda Agni is regarded by the seers as the all-effecting and all-knowing pilot of their journey. Kumara is also looked up to for his immense store of knowledge and wisdom by these seers of later times. Again, the mighty Indra is there, but in the Tantra and the Puranas his part is taken up by Rudra the powerful who brooks no obstacle. The hosts of Indra—the Maruts—continue as the *pramathas* of Rudra. Indra the *marutvān*, leader of the hosts of Maruts, the storm-gods or life-powers, continues to play his effective part as Rudra the lord of the *pramathas*, Pramathanatha. The Sun, the Highest God of the Veda is also here as Vishnu—a name which is applied to the Supreme Sun in the Rig Veda itself. Aditi, the mother of All, is not there under the same nomenclature, but there is the Supreme Shakti called variously Uma, Gouri, etc. All the important Gods are there. The other minor gods with mainly physical functions and less of the psychological have been consigned to the position of the *dik-pālakas*, guardians of the several quarters or of some other minor importance. Newer Gods have arrived, true, but the older ones have not been altogether supplanted and totally forgotten, they retain their due supremacy though in different form.

We have referred to that interesting feature of the Tantra, namely the recognition of the Supreme Deity as the Highest with a simultaneous adoration of a number of other deities. The sages of the Tantra do not see any inconsistency in the position, for they recognise that this creation is not a unitary system but a gradation of worlds spread over a rising tier of consciousness and planes and the various Gods and Goddesses are higher beings, powers and entities deriving their authority from the Supreme to take their part, and act or preside over their spheres of domain. There is a regular hierarchy of Gods some of whom are far above the highest heavens of human reach. But there are also Gods and Goddesses closer to the human level. They are more readily accessible to those who aspire to them and in some cases the seeker on the Tantric path looks to the aid and lead of these deities in his effort. They are endowed with capacities and powers beyond normal human possibility, but they are not all for that reason divine in nature. There are higher and lower classes of them, *ucca* and *kṣudra* Devatas. Those

"উচ্চ" "ক্ষুদ্র"

that are nearest to the earth-plane, swarming in the vital world overtopping the physical, are usually of the latter type. They respond very readily to the approaches of those who seek their help, but they do so mainly for their own purpose, namely to get hold of the particular human vehicle and convert it into a centre for their activity on the earth. They may and do answer the call of the seeker in the beginning but in the end they let him down, rather roughly, once their purpose is fulfilled. The seeker is misled, his inner progress comes to a standstill if it does not end in disaster. The Kshudra-devatas mislead the seeker with petty glamorous gifts, induce a false sense of progress and *siddhi*, prevent the dawn of real Jnana which would expose their whole game and succeed in enslaving the man for their purpose at the cost of his soul which is betrayed into misadventure. It is to eliminate all such chances and possibilities of mishap that orthodox spiritual tradition frowns upon and strongly discourages occult lines of effort in which intercourse with the beings of other worlds is not rare. But we must remember at the same time that all the Devatas or deities are not of this type. There are benevolent deities who answer equally readily to the prayers of the devotee and their help is inestimable for him if only he keeps his Ideal pure and aloft. If he aspires only for the Highest the deity helps him, takes him a long way, not merely with spiritual aid but help of other kinds as well. The Tantra Shastra has done signal service in emphasising that though all the Devatas are of the same divine origin, yet each has a special stress in its character, each is meant to actualise or help to actualise the particular potentiality of the Supreme in creation. Thus certain deities have it within their power to confer wealth; material and spiritual, some to confer health of mind and body, some have an exclusively spiritual function. It is again a fact to be noted that prayer to an indefinite something, to an Impersonal divinity can only evoke an impersonal or indefinite response. If a response is sought to be evoked for a particular need, the prayer could be fruitful when it is addressed to a canalised centre of the Divinity, the Personal form which is active for the purpose in question, and that is precisely what the Devata in its higher sense is in the Tantra. Spiritual progress with the help of deities as these is rendered easy and safe. The sincerity with which the seeker puts himself into their care guarantees safety against the rocks and steeps in the path, the progress is smoother and the growing realisation richer by reason of the happy contribution made and especial gifts conferred on him by these chosen deities, *iṣṭa-devatās*.

The Tantra Shastra develops the means wherewith to commune with the Gods. Man is endowed with faculties all of which are not active or perceptible to the physical mind, but are nonetheless real; and given the necessary touch of awakening and opportunity for development, they function with much more effect and with an infinitely larger range than the usually active sense-organs. The ancients knew this and developed various lines of discipline for the development of this less-cared-for and hidden side of man in which lies the means for his deliverance from helpless subjection to the bonds of physical nature. There are many lines of Yoga, including Hatha Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Raja Yoga, Laya Yoga, not to speak of Devotion and Knowledge, each with its own basis, technique and process of functioning and the seeker has to choose in accordance with the aptitude of his nature and demands of his soul the proper way he would commence. Now the Tantriks took over these Yogas, as they were, improved upon them with their special knowledge of the occult worlds and applied these means for opening up the inner centres that window upon the supraphysical and still higher regions. But they did not stop with that alone. They developed another Sadhana which also had significant origins with the Vedic Rishis—the *mantra.* The Mantra-Sadhana has survived to this day as the most significant contribution of the Tantras to the spiritual heritage of mankind. A Mantra, as is well known, is not a mere letter or collection of letters, with some meaning. It is the sound-body of a Power charged with the intense vibrations of the spiritual personality of the creator or the seer of the Mantra. The Mantra is an ever-living embodiment of the Truth and Power which have found expression in it through the medium of the Rishi or Yogin who has given them that body. And when a Mantra is uttered, under proper conditions, it is not the feeble voice of the reciter that goes forth to evoke the response of the Gods to whom it is addressed, but the flame of *tapasyā* and realisation that is lying coiled up in the body of that utterance. The vibrations issuing from the Mantra are its own and they create the necessary conditions in and around the reciter appropriate to the reception of the response from the deity to whom the address is made. The form of the Mantra may be coherent words or may be single letters arranged in a certain order. The Tantra has thus formulated some seed-letters, *Bijākṣara,* which the seeker uses as the Mantra. These Bijaksharas have been endowed with a perennial store of power by the Tantrik seers and it needs only the living touch of the Guru to set them awake in the disciple. This is the true sense in which the use of the Mantras is to be understood. They are not, as at times the superficial mind may be tempted to suppose, just convenient aids for concentration, mechanical devices for keeping the mind from wandering.

These are the essentials of the Tantra Sadhana—the

Devata, the Mantra and the Guru. The Devatas are certainly not worshipped in the abstract. They are approached in the form in which they revealed themselves to the inner eye of these seers. For these Gods and Goddesses, though they may not have the physical form of the gross kind, have yet their own characteristic figure and colour. They have their own vehicles, *vāhana*, their auras of specific colour. Some of them reveal their presence in certain definite symbols. All these are matters of experience with the Tantric seers who proceeded to render these subtle forms and figures in their physical correspondences as close and faithful as possible. Hence the sacredness and importance attached to the images and figures in the Tantric ritual. The image, *mūrti*, or the diagram, *yantra*, are the meeting places of the Invisible Presence of the Deity and the sensebound soarings of human aspiration.

The Bijakshara, the Mantra of the seed-letter, is also no construction or invention of the imaginative Tantriks. These letters have an individuality of their own shade and colour and reveal themselves as such. Each seed-letter refers to a certain principle related to the Tattva of the Deity. And it could by itself be a Mantra or form a Mantra in conjunction with other seed-letters or words.

Then there is the Guru, who carries the Tantric tradition in himself, is instinct in some measure with the living presence of the deity invoked and who implants the Mantra along with the activating personal force of his own in the disciple. The Mantra-dynamis is set in motion within the being of the disciple by the Guru and if only he would co-operate by assiduous attention and compliance with the needs of the growing Sadhana the progress is assured and the goal sure of reach. The Guru, the Deity, the Mantra are all equally important. The Shastra goes so far as to combine them in the identity of a single whole, and with reason. For the Guru is present in the Mantra through the influence he puts into it while initiating the disciple. The Devata is present in the Mantra which is indeed the sound-body of the deity. Again the Devata is also present in the person of the Guru. And it is the Mantra which works out the Sadhana. That is why it is said, the Guru, the Devata and the Mantra are one, *guru-devatā-manūnām aikyam*.

Thus it will be seen that the Tantra Shastra attaches great importance to all the three essentials of the Sadhana. The Guru is much more than the physical appearance he wears; he is looked upon as the embodiment of the Deity sought to be realised or attained; to look upon him as a human being like any other is not merely wrong but also a dangerous delusion. Then there is the image in which the deity is worshipped. The image or the form is the 'material foundation' to form the 'physical nodus' for the act of external worship. To look upon such an image as mere stone is profane. Again the Mantra has a special character, it is the body of a spiritual truth or deity. The look upon it as mere letters is to blaspheme the sacred character of the Mantra. Thus the Tantriks have a famous dictum which sums up the Tantric position in regard to the Guru, the Image and the Mantra: "To hell he goes who mistakes the Guru for a human, who takes the image for a piece of stone, who looks upon the Mantra as mere letters."[1]

III

This, then, is the Tantric system in its fundamentals. We see that there is nothing in it which runs radically counter to the ancient spirit of the Vedic teachings. On the other hand there is much in conformity with it or in continuation of it. It has assimilated the Vedic spirit and revived it in a modified form. If there is a note critical and antagonistic to the Vedas in some of the extreme texts of the Tantra, it is in the nature of a rejoinder provoked by criticism of the later Vedists, the Smritikaras that the Tantra, unlike the Veda, has no sacred character about it because all castes, *varṅas*, including women, have access to it, and such other insinuations. We have referred to the esteem in which they hold the Vedas. The central feature of the Vedic ritual, viz., the Yajna is taken up in the ritual of the Tantra with suitable changes and there is no temple without a *yāga-śāla*, Sacrificial Hall. The gods of the Veda continue to adorn the Tantric pantheon; their functions continue, but vary in form; the names undergo a change. The same gods are worshipped under different names and, what is remarkable, at times the very same Mantras and gods in the Rig Veda figure in the Tantra in all their grandeur. We shall illustrate this point as it is important to show how the Tantra has worked its way up to adumbrate in it the gods of the Vedic pantheon. We shall take an example from the *Prapancasratantra* which deals with many deities, Vaishnava, Shaiva, Shakta without distinction of superiority of any one over the other.

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[1] देशिके मानवभ्रान्तिं प्रतिमासु शिलामतिम् ।
मन्त्रेष्वक्षरबुद्धिं च कुर्वाणो निरयं व्रजेत् ॥

Agni in the Rig Veda is a deity of paramount importance without whose help it is impossible for the sacrificer to proceed. Agni is the seer who finds the way, the *pāvaka* who burns the dross and cleanses the seeker of all sin and impurity, carries him through all obstacles, like a boat over the seas, *nāveva sindhum*. In the Shakta Tantra the same Deity is worshipped as Durga, the indomitable, the protectrix who carries the devotee safe across the sea of misery, the ocean of birth and death, *bhavasāgara-nauḥ*. And what is more important, in one place the exact Mantra addressed to Agni in the Veda is applied here to Durga.

It is in the text referred to above that we come across three Mantras which have been combined together to form a hundred letters and give what is known as the *śatākṣari vidyā*. The first Mantra consisting of 44 letters, in *triṣṭup* metre, is bodily taken from the 99th Sukta of the first Mandala in the Rig Veda.

Agni is the seer, knower of all. It lies in his power to render us all help as a result of his fore-knowledge. Knowledge is a most priceless possession of man and without it he is rudderless in the sea of life. And Agni deprives the enemy of this indispensable possession. To him, says the Rishi, let us offer our choicest gift, the very sap of life, the distilled juice of Ananda, the Soma, so that pleased, he would transport us over all the eddies and whirls, tides and waves of obstruction and misfortune that beset life. 'Like a boat across the waters', is a favourite image of the ancients. It is repeated in the Upanishads, it also finds mention in the Tantric text referred to. Here is the Rik and the English rendering:

जातवेदसे सुनवाम सोममरातीयतो नि दहाति वेदः ।
स नः पर्षदति दुर्गाणि विश्वा नावेव सिन्धुं दुरितात्यग्निः ॥

'To the Knower of all Birth (Agni) we press Soma, to him who consumes the knowledge (or wealth) of the enemy. Let Agni carry us across all the obstructions like a boat over the river.'

In the Veda the Rik is ascribed to Rishi Kashyapa; in the Tantric text also the Seer of the Mantra is Kashyapa. There the deity is Agni, here it is Durga.

Then follows the second part of the Shatakshari (hundred-lettered Mantra) of 32 letters, in *anuṣṭup* metre, which again is a verbatim reproduction of the 12th Rik in the 59th Sukta of the seventh Mandala in the Rig Veda. The Rik is addressed to Rudra as Tryambaka, father of the Three (worlds). The Rishi aspires towards immortality for himself and for others who have engaged themselves in the Yajna, the *antar-yajna*. He has a claim for immortality as a child of the Gods, a position he has attained not merely by his endeavours but by the benign grace of the Gods themselves. But this high status of immortality cannot be won and retained by any one without a certain elevation and strength of purity; the utmost that human effort can build up in the direction is inadequate. Only the Divine can promote and shape the requisite all-round strength and fitness. Again desire, want, greed, lust bring in their train disappointment, grief, unhappiness, disease and ultimately death. And for those that aspire for immortality there should be nothing in them which clings to its opposite, viz. death and agents of death. He that would share in the high status above has necessarily to be aloof and separate from, even while living amidst it, the envelope of ignorance and darkness that characterise the human world, like a cucumber separate from its shell, says the Rishi, like the ripe cocoanut loosened from its shell, say the saints and sages of later times.

त्र्यम्बकं यजामहे सुगन्धिं पुष्टिवर्धनम् ।
उर्वारुकमिव बन्धनान्मृत्योमुक्षीय मामृतात् ॥

'We adore the Father of the three worlds, Tryambaka of auspicious Fame, increaser of fullness and strength. May I be detached from Death like cucumber from the shell (or the stem,) not from the Immortal.'

In the Rig Veda, this Rik ascribed to Vasishtha is addressed to Rudra, as Tryambaka, father of the three worlds. Here in the Tantra also the deity is Rudra, as Mrityunjaya, conqueror of Death and the Mantra is famous as the Mrityunjaya Mantra.

The third part of 24 letters, in *gāyatri* metre, is the famous Gayatri from the 62nd Sukta of Rishi Vishwamitra in the third Mandala of the Rig Veda. Savitr is the deity in the Veda; the same supreme deity is invoked here also. Savitr, it must be noted is identified with Vishnu here as in the Rig Veda. Vishwamitra is the seer of the Mantra here also. The Sun, Savitr, is not the physical sun we see in the skies, but the supreme Effulgence in the highest firmament above, beyond the lower triple creation. The physical sun is indeed taken as the image of the Truth-Sun, the Centre of all Knowledge and radiating Power. It is the radiance issuing from the Supreme Source in which is massed all the creative movement of the Uncreate that is the ultimate root of all movements in the creation. Let that Light motivate and energise our thought-movements, says the Rishi.

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।
धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

'We meditate upon that excellent splendour of the Lord Savitr. May he activate our thoughts.'

One significant fact shall not escape notice here inasmuch as it illustrates the remarkable facility with which these seers reconcile the claims of the respective votaries of Vishnu, Shiva and Para Shakti for supremacy. Thus here in this single Vidya, there is Durga who stands for the Para Shakti of the Shakta, there is Rudra in place of Shiva and there is Savitr, Surya for Vishnu. All are placed on the same supreme

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level of adoration, all are simultaneously invoked in the prayer poured forth by the Sadhaka.

Such is the synthesis of the Tantra, broad-based and deep-rooted, catholic and progressive. It does not ignore or overlook any past heritage of spiritual value. Its Jnana-pada, the metaphysical basis, combines in itself the essence of the Vedantic philosophy with all the spirit of pliability and catholicity of the ancient Rishis. The Yoga-pada, the practical side, revives the remnants of past lines of Yoga as far as possible and carries further the esoteric tradition, absorbs and develops the later physico-vital and psychological methods of self-development and self-exceeding. The Kriya-pada, the social and the ceremonial aspect, takes up the institution of community worship and ritual from immemorial times and extends the claim of the Spirit on the entire society. The Charya-pada, bearing upon personal conduct, re-establishes the claim of society on the individual and reconciles it with the special privileges and responsibilities of the latter issuing from his spiritual transcendence.

THOUGHTS ON TANTRA

We propose to consider certain features of Tantra Shastra with special reference to Chandi, famous as Durga.

Upadhyaya is a Tantrika; he knows the art of propitiating the spirits—deities as he calls them—and averts certain sorts of evil that may otherwise befall his clients. Among other things, he knows and puts into practice with remarkable success a curious art. He casts a spell over a given area, definite and reasonably limited of course, and goes away, and that becomes a prohibited area for the cobra. This man's method has nothing to do with the tact of the snake-charmer or the use of any material means to rope in or drive out the venomous reptile. An incident which took place just a few weeks ago would go to point out the character of the genuine magic, or we may add, of the occult significance of the phenomenon we would presently relate.

We may call it superstition, but it is a popular belief, quite often verified and therefore dynamic, that to kill a cobra is fraught with danger to the killer and to the household that is, or promises to become, its home or a resort of its frequent visitation. Now this happened in the house of my young friend's sister; he returned here a fortnight ago after paying a short visit to his ancestral home. Thus, it is a first-hand report since he was present there at the time and mention of the details would repay the attention paid to it. The family with children has been living in the house for many years; but all on a sudden, one day a cobra was sighted within their lodging, to the annoyance of the inmates. Certainly there was awe, but awe with a dash of an almost religious sentiment. The hooded creature became a frequent visitor, unharmed, naturally unwanted. What was to be done? To their good luck, Upadhyaya in his itinerary had come to the township. When he was approached with the problem, he agreed to take up the question. He sat for a while and did some ritual, very simple and formal, got up and said "I have done the thing, *digbandha*; the quarters are closed, the fence is completed, the enclosure is impenetrable." Next day, what took place was indeed amazing. The cobra did not turn up, but that itself may be accounted for somehow, as due to causes other than the magic of the *māntrika*. But the miracle of a mongoose running about in the house in place of the cobra, solved the problem of the family, while winning laurels for the Upadhyaya.

We can give by all means our own explanation, that the man was in contact with the spirit, *kṣudra devatā* presiding over the cobra group, or some other explanation. The Tantrik says he consulted his goddess, she consented to help him. Whatever way we look at such a phenomenon, it remains a fact and cannot be explained away. Well, this is undoubtedly a Tantric act.

Similar and still more remarkable incidents which are brought about by human agency through unusual powers are within our personal knowledge and enable us to conclude that those who wield such powers are usually ignorant and do not know how they get them, but know the occult formulae, the technique, or even have the influence and capacity transmitted to them by an adept in the field. But all these are generally despised by people whose lives are influenced by religious or moral sentiments. Yet these go by the name of Tantra. Usually, the Tantrik of this sort does not prosper even in the ways of ignorance, lives a miserable life, ends his life in misery.

Such practices in some form or other are not confined to this country. A journalist hailing from England toured this country some years ago and wrote a book in which he devoted sufficient number of pages to Spirituality in India and in illustration of it gave an account of his meeting a genuine famous saint. What he wrote was informative and proved useful to many who were drawn to the subject and to the centres of genuine spiritual Force to which he had made reference. The book made him famous overnight, we might say deservedly, so much that he came to be looked upon as a Guru himself by some good people. But later when he went to search for some genuine magic in Egypt, he saw and learnt many things about cobras and giant scorpions and wrote again; but it was a steep descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, a fine illustration of the contrast between spirituality and spiritualism.

There are certain Tantric books which are indeed abominable; some of them are published and available in the market, but are definitely wicked. The misleading element lies in the titles of these books such as Siddha Shankara Tantra, Dattatreya Tantra, etc. and quite often in the childish, if not mischievous sham that the subject-matter purports to be all instruction or information that Shiva once upon a time gave to Parvati. But we need not dilate upon this despicable side of Tantra which includes not only transaction with the elemental spirits and other powers of a low order, but also the degradation of high ideals, of true spirituality of the Shakta cult into the "left-hand worship" *vāmācāra*, represented by the five "M"s. But before leaving this lowest aspect of Tantra which in some respects corresponds to the spiritualism or spiritism of the West, and includes in a way the aims of the modern attempts of Mesmerism, Hypnotism and certain sorts of groping occultism, we may remark that the method employed depends upon external devices, uses of certain "occult" drugs which are believed to attract the spirit-force or spirit-being as well as certain figures and diagrams and secret code-words.

The Tantra Shastra proper,—leaving aside the lower forms and the baser accretions—is strictly the science of the Mantras. If on one side, it is vulgar and discredited, as briefly noted above, on the other side it is exalted, combines in itself the highest form of Yoga and knowledge and devotion so much so that it might be termed a synthesis on broad lines of practical methods pursued by aspirants of different persuasions. By the use of the Mantra, mystic syllables, powers of concentration are developed to open the centres that are ordinarily closed in the human system. And these centres, when opened, become steps in the staircase, in the rising tier of Consciousness functioning as windows upon a wider and wider existence, of a larger world teeming with forces and beings whom one may contact on the way or ignore and move onward towards the highest reach, the Supreme Consciousness. The Tantric Yoga at its highest aims at the realisation of the highest Consciousness and the powers natural to it. There are certain features that distinguish it from other Yogas of which brief mention here may not be out of place. Certain lines of Yoga can be practised without any serious belief in the existence of God, a higher Intelligence, and one can indeed meet with success if the aim be the usual control of mind, a certain mastery of vital functionings in the body and increase in the vital capacity for holding the will and exercise of the breath control and mind control, and concentration leading to trance. Certainly, Raja Yoga can be practised, not to talk of Hattayoga, without any devotion to or faith in God. Faith in the Guide, the Guru, faith in the efficacy of the line followed, faith in one's own capacity to achieve the end in view—this threefold faith is enough, but necessary, as indeed it is necessary for the Tantric yoga also, while in the latter the element of devotion with faith in the higher power and grace of the Shakti is *sine quo non* from the very beginning. And it has an advantage over Jnana Yoga in that it relies and depends upon the guidance of the Shakti for the fruitful course of the discipline followed. We thus see that the Tantra aims very high, and the practice carries within it the essentials of many disciplines.

II

Now that we have briefly noted the two extreme sides of the Tantra Shastra, we shall proceed to consider here a question connected with Mantras that is generally ignored by scholars who deliberate, philosophise and write upon the subject. It is perfectly true that the aim of the Tantra is to achieve the Highest, and the Mantra is used as a means for concentration to open the centres of consciousness for the gradual unfoldment of knowledge and power leading to the ultimate goal. But we must pause here and see if the Mantra is just a mechanical device, means for concentration and nothing else. There is a truth often ignored by philosophers of Tantra, not by those who take to the Mantra Sadhana. It is this that there are many deities with the Supreme Deity at the summit and through any of them, by his or her help, one can get at the Supreme or the Supreme can through any of the deities favour the initiate and give him the necessary lift. The point to be noted here is that the Supreme Deity does not negate or annul the existence of the deities but on the other hand uses them for her (or his) purpose or allows them free scope to deal with the Sadhaka in accordance with the spirit and manner of his approach. And these deities are realities, entities, beings with intelligence and power appropriate to the levels they occupy in the hierarchy of the grades of Cosmic existence. Once we recognise the fact that there are distinct Powers, beings whose influence man can receive, who can be contacted through proper means, we have accepted that the lower the levels they occupy, the easier the contact effected. It is this fact that accounts for the black magic part of the Tantra to which we referred as degrading and despicable. For there are good as well as evil forces and beings, spirits evil especially on the levels that are nearer the Earth-plane.

But there are higher beings, with a larger field for their activity, with knowledge and power proper to their station and natural to the order they belong to in the Cosmic scale. There are still higher beings, Gods and Goddesses proper, with cosmic functionings and nearer to the Supreme Cosmic Godhead who presides over the creation. They are, one may say, vehicles, instruments, with distinct characteristics, and therefore individual Gods and Goddesses in that sense; they may be, some of them, in closer touch or conscious union with the Supreme Deity, whose work they carry out. Now the Mantra Sadhana claims to win the favour and grace of any of these, not necessarily for reaching the supreme goal, though there is always that possibility. The Sadhaka aims at first to be in the good graces of the God or Goddess, so that he can get the necessary guidance in life. As he progresses, and finds some measure of success in the Sadhana, if his deity happens to be a being of a lower order he may prosper for a time in the line of his choice, and very likely close his career in failure. If the deity of his choice be of a higher order and his Sadhana proceeds with certain signs of help from his *iṣṭa devatā*, his progress brings about a change in his attitude to life, and his devotion to the deity grows stronger, stronger than his attractions to the aims of common life with which he may have started the Sadhana for success in life through the favour of a Devata. And in the end, the Sadhana naturally leads the Sadhaka beyond his first aims, either by fulfilling or cancelling them, to the larger and higher aim of life which indeed is the goal of all lines of approach to the Supreme. But if from the very start, the Sadhaka takes to the Mantra of any particular Personality and form of the Supreme Deity with the sole object of realising the highest through the favour of the God or Goddess he worships, and the Sadhana proceeds on proper lines, safe passage is assured and the burden of the Sadhana is taken in hand by the Deity in the long run, through various stages of communion and contact, and unmistakable touches of the Influence or the Presence frequently sensed with certitude.

Mantra Sadhana proceeds on the basis that there are distinct Individualities, Gods, Goddesses with Forces and beings dependent on them and emanating from them, even as they themselves are emanations and personalities of the Supreme; and this fact will be evident from a casual perusal of source-books on Tantra Shastra, and some of the standard books like *Prapancasāra* whose authorship is ascribed to Shankaracharya. But nowhere is it so pronounced and clearly brought to light as in the second and third section of the threefold Episode of the *Devīmāhātmya* to which we would refer later on. Here we shall confine ourselves to one question, the subject of the Mantra. On the basis of the teachings of the Tantra Shastra itself, it is but proper to dismiss as puerile the apparently rational explanation of the use of the Mantra as a device for concentration. For in that case the Mantra becomes just one of the many mechanical devices that can be used,—a kith of crystal-gazing which also is a device. The Tantric claim is different, the Mantra is held to be a powerful instrument; itself is a power clothed in sound-symbol that is potent and lives in its sphere, and is meant to appeal directly to the deity for favour and help and ultimately to reveal the light and power and presence of the deity itself. The Mantra has inherent power, but its manifestation depends upon the fulfilment of one of the two conditions: either the Guru who gives the Mantra must be a Mantra-siddha, an adept, capable of awakening the initiate to the deeper vibrations of the Mantra-consciousness; or the disciple must be ripe enough for awakening the Mantra-power to ring and pulsate with the inner consciousness or the deeper being in him that is the meeting ground for the worshipped deity and worshipping soul. If both the conditions are present, then it goes without saying that success naturally becomes easier. It is certainly true that what is achieved by the Mantra Sadhana can be achieved by other means also, by pure devotion or else by higher forms of Yoga for which all is possible, in principle. But that fact does not detract from the value and characteristic line of Mantra Sadhana as a definite way of approach not only to a particular deity, but even to the Supreme. For it combines in itself devotion and concentration for a life disciplined to commune with the Devata which by itself can confer upon the Sadhaka all knowledge of Yoga and the opening of the inner centres of power and knowledge. This is possible of course when the Mantra-siddhi is accomplished bringing with it what is called *sākṣātkāra*, the Presence and consciousness of it. Besides, in certain lines of Tantric Sadhana, the Mantra is looked upon as a sound-body of the Devata which fact is particularly stressed in the case of certain Mantras,—in this connection *Sri Vidya* is notable. Also, in the case of certain Devatas, prominence is not given to the repetition of the Mantra, but to the devotional aspect in which recitals play a dominant role, reinforcing the aspirational capacity enlightening the faith and will to achieve the end which is the attainment of the *anugraha* of the adored Deity. Favour or even grace is not an adequate rendering of this Sanskrit word. For the expression denotes an act on the part of the Adored, an action with effect that continues without break, a gracious smile or glance that is cast upon the worshipper, who is seized and held in it so closely that time or place could not separate the human and the Divine, Jiva and Deva. This is the significance of the term, *anu-graha*, (*grah* to seize and hold, with *anu*, to pursue or follow i.e. without interruption.)

III

We have just mentioned the importance of recitals—what is called *pārāyaṇa*—in certain worship and this is specially applicable to the worship of Chandi as advocated in the Saptashati, the famous *Devī-māhātmya*. It is not that the Mantra-japa is not important or has no place in this cult. It has its place and importance for the purpose of *japa*, inaudible repetition of the mystic syllables and *dhyāna*, silent meditation. But the recital of the text assumes a greater importance in this worship because the text itself takes the place of the Mantra treated as sacred utterance of inspiration ; it is surcharged with a purifying potency that clears the atmosphere and appeals in supplication and with confidence for the manifestation of the presence of the Devi. A word is necessary here to draw the line of distinction between the Mantra for Japa and Mantra for recital.

In the former, inward repetition in silence leading to concentration is the characteristic way, and the Mantra is usually short. It can be even a single syllable, what is called Seed-letter, *bījākṣara*, and is related to a particular God or Goddess; it has its special feature, even subtle form and colour perceptible to the subtle vision, and in it is centred the gravity of the God or Goddess. Naturally, in such Sadhanas, the yogic element with personal responsibility preponderates until the gracious Presence becomes clear, *prasanna*, and the Sadhaka receives the grace, *prasāda*, of the Devata. It is said of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, that when he uttered a mantra, or a seed-sound, say Rum, Agni signified by the sound-symbol appeared to his vision with his occult native colour. But Paramahamsa was an exceptional case, because he was already in the Mother-consciousness and from there he could objectify any subtle truth that is not manifest in the outer existence.

But the Mantra used in *pārāyaṇa* is audibly recited, it has an effect on the surroundings, in the general atmosphere; it contributes greatly to the development of the devotional element which indeed becomes very effective as it progresses and invokes the Presence to dominate the place of worship and govern and guide the devotee. We may remark in passing that all devotional compositions, verse or prose or musical texts are not Mantras, nor are Mantras always in verse or in prose form. We must note the fact that the Tantric Mantra is usually short, even a single syllable packed with the force or the symbolic sense related to the particular deity. Occasionally, verses from some inspired poems or scriptural texts like the Saptashati are treated and used as Mantra. But the Vedic hymns are of a different order, they are all Mantras where the meaning is as important as the text, and generally meant for recitals, though a short verse may be selected for Japa and meditation on the meaning of the Mantra with devotion to the Devata, as is done in the case of the famous Gayatri. But usually all Vedic Mantras are used for recitals while a few selected passages have become famous as texts for Japa.

To return to the Saptashati. This is famous as a sacred text which occupies a special place as a Tantric scripture. There is no other work in the whole of the Tantra Shastra which enjoys such a deserved reputation as an assured and effective means for the worship of the Devi. It is a special line of approach to the Supreme Goddess Durga, 'not easy of access' to mortals as is meant by the term. Though Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati are her special Manifestations as spoken of in the text, they are not the same as those that come under the category of what is called the Ten Grand Sciences (occult and spiritual), Dasha-Mahavidyas. For the latter are different and independent, and each one of them is directly the Supreme Goddess communed with and worshipped in accordance with certain rules and rituals formulated in the respective Tantras. Here in this worship of Durga otherwise called Chandi, recital of the text is much more important than the Japa of the Mantra, not to speak of the rituals, though these have certainly their place in all Tantric worship as they provide for a material basis to form a nodus for the physical and outward act of adoration. So much importance is attached to the sacredness of the text that every verse in it is treated as Mantra in the Katyayani Tantra. And this is done in spite of the fact that all the 700 verses do not describe the glory of the Goddess, as there are many verses which are narratives related to the origin and end of the stories of the Devi. Besides, there has been a tradition that the Chandi worship has a Vedic basis. How far and in what sense it is correct to say that this Durga worship has Vedic basis is a question we shall consider within the brief space we have set for ourselves here. But before doing so it is necessary to have an idea of the subject matter of the Saptashati. It is not necessary here to dwell at length on the details of the story as it is so popular and well-known and could be gathered from the simple and easy, though powerful, text itself or otherwise from translations. Let us then recall the whole story and state it in a few passages.

Two unlucky men meet in a forest, come to know of each other's pitiable plight, for one had lost his kingdom, and another all his wealth. They consult a sage there, who answers their questions, clears their doubts and at their request gives them instructions in regard to the worship of Durga. They carry out the instructions, engage themselves in worship and austere meditation, *tapas*, and at the end of three years, they had bestowed upon them the Grace of the Devi who revealed Herself to them and granted their request. Suratha, the Kshatriya, got back his kingdom, while Samadhi, the Vaishya got what he asked for, supreme Knowledge. This is the story. Now, apart from instructions in the secrets of worship (*rahasyokta-vidhānena*) that the sage Medhas gave the two devotees at the close of their meeting, he first spoke to them of the Glory of the Supreme Goddess, illustrating it in three episodes, *caritas*, of the Devi—the first related to Mahakali, the terrible Ruler of the Night, the Yoga-nidra of Hari, who is the destroyer of Madhu and Kaitabha ; the second to Mahalakshmi, who makes an end of Mahishasura, and to the third to Mahasaraswati, who deals the death-blow to Shumbha and Nishumbha. It is not possible to enter into a discussion of the significance of these exploits of the Goddess ; for they must form part of a separate subject for consideration.

Suffice it to note these events are not happenings on the Earth-plane, or of this age which is the cycle of Vaivasvata Manu. But the description of the battles between the Goddess with her Vibhutis and emanations on one side and the Asuras and their forces on the other are significant and throw light on happenings and activities in a different world and plane which have their bearing on Earth-life and human existence. Another notable fact is that there are truths hidden from our vision, regarding good and evil forces, *daivic* and *āsuric*, contending for supremacy over this world, this Earth whose fate quite often hangs in the balance, but is ultimately decided in her favour by the intervention of the Supreme Power, Mahashakti, of the Lord of the Universe. And this will be evident to any casual reader of the Saptashati; there are memorable passages that often ring in our ears in which the promise of intervention in crises made by the Devi constitutes a scripture-monument to the Divine vigilance over human affairs on Earth. The inspiring verses in which the words of assurance are couched are untranslatable; yet even a feeble echo of it in English may convey something of the spirit breathed in these prophetic utterances that the sage-author of the Saptashati communicates to us.

In the first Charita we find the sage affirming "Though She is eternal, immanent in the whole Universe which is Her embodiment, She takes birth again and again, incarnates Herself in a special form of Her choice for the successful regime of the Gods, Devas—for establishing Divine Principles in the world-order that its functionings may increasingly harmonise with the eternal verities and higher laws of the creative Godhead." Again in the second Charita when the Gods regain their lost kingdom by the destruction of the Asura by the Devi and adore and sing her glory, the

Goddess in Her grandeur, highly pleased, promises to come to the rescue of the Gods whenever there is need and they are put to trouble by the Asuric forces, the Demons. Similarly, in the third and the last Charita, when the task of the Mother is over, the Gods adore Her and chant hymns in praise of Her prowess, of Her manifestations and of Her motherly heart. She is pleased and again gives Her word of assurance to stand by the side of the Gods in times of need and stress, and also declares that She would ever be present in places where, these hymns are recited and used in prayers. Finally the Devi speaks of her future incarnations.

It is certainly a fact of religious experience of devotees even today that in such recitals and places of worship something of Her Presence, of Her Grace is felt and it cannot be understood, much less appreciated by those who have no inkling into or not cared to investigate into these aspects of life devoted to higher and godward life. Nor can these stories of Gods and Asuras and their battles be intelligible to those who seriouly think that the physical universe and material existence are the sole and fundamental Reality. Here we cannot resist the temptation of quoting Sri Aurobindo. The best way of understanding the meaning of these stories of battles between Gods and Asuras is to ponder over and grasp the sense and spirit of certain passages in his writings in a different connection. We shall quote a passage or two that will be helpful to the thoughtful reader to know for himself the import of such episodes.

"The soul of man is a world full of beings, a kingdom in which armies clash to help or hinder a supreme conquest, a house where the gods are our guests and which the demons strive to possess." "The soul is a battlefield full of helpers and hurters, friends and enemies, all this lives, teems, is personal, is conscious, is active."

A word more before we proceed to the question of the Vedic basis of the Chandi. This scripture is included in the Markandeya Purana. The Purana purports to be a dialogue between Markandeya and Kroshtuki. Therefore he is the sage, the Rishi, the seer, of the whole scripture. The mystical reverence in which the Devi-Mahatmya is held can be best understood if we remember a tradition that comes down to us through orthodox Vaidiks who are worshippers of Chandi. The Saptashati, they hold, is a great *artha śāstra* i.e., a Shastra that teaches us the means of realising all ends in life, not *artha* in the restricted sense of Wealth or Economics. Thus the standard texts for the four purposes of life, *puruṣārtha*, are in order: Manu for Dharma Shastra (which is said to have been originally 700 verses), Devi-Mahatmya for Artha, Vatsayana for Kama (which also is said to have been at first 700 Sutras) and the Bhagavad Gita for Moksha (which is also 700). Whether there is significance in the number 700 or not is not quite material for our consideration here. But the tradition shows that the aim of Saptashati is not in a limited or one-sided direction. It includes the aims of life here and the supreme purpose as well. And this is borne out in the story of Suratha and Samadhi by the Power and Knowledge they were respectively favoured with, for Kingdom represents supreme Power and enjoyment, *bhoga*, in the world. It is not an exclusive this-worldliness or other-worldliness whose fulfilment is vouchsafed in the Saptashati. Even when Suratha longs for regaining his lost kingdom, it is not the same old self of the miserable man that grabs at the power bestowed on him by the grace of the Goddess. For, before he started the Sadhana in accordance with the instructions he received from the sage, he understood and assimilated the truths about the Devi and the world and the cause of suffering therein, and thus qualified himself for a rigorous life and turned towards the Divine Mother ; for only thus is an effective discipline possible to earn and receive her favour and help. And it is necessary to note that the sage laid stress in the very beginning on the fact that all misery owes its origin to *mamatā*, the sense of 'mine'. Suratha, then, had the added difficulty of having the world-enjoyment by renouncing it as 'not mine,' *bhoga* by *tyāga*, while the man for Knowledge, Samadhi, the Vaishya, had unburdened himself of worldly cares and joys as well. Both started the same Sadhana, driven by misery; both changed, each in his own way. A few lines (free rendering in English) from the first Chapter in which the sage expounds the root cause of all suffering and the remedy thereof would go to show the high aim of the worship advocated in the Saptashati.

" All creatures have a consciousness of their own and are instinct with the desire to preserve themselves and their knowledge is spread over the objects of senses. Of the created beings, some are born day-blind, some night-blind, while others are, day and night, of equal vision. The knowledge of man is in no way better than that of birds and beasts which show great skill in preserving *themselves* and what is *theirs*. Here again the sense and feeling of 'mine' is spread over all creation—man and beast alike; know then, the cause of all this is Ignorance, Avidya, which is not the creation of any being on earth or in heaven. It is a product of the workings of Mahamaya, the great illusory power of Lord Vishnu. She is the power for bondage as well as for liberation, for ignorance and for knowledge. By Her the whole universe is set in motion revolving incessantly and containing in it all that is mobile and immobile. She, in short, is the Power of Hari, the Lord of the Universe—called Yoga Nidra, the Sleep-power of Yoga or the superconscious poise of the Supreme Being."

Now we will turn to the Vedic basis of the 'Chandi'. It is traced to the 125th hymn of the tenth Book of the Rig Veda. We get the clue from a line in the closing verses of the Saptashati where it is stated that the Devi Sukta was being used for Japa, "*devisuktam param japan*". But we do not find anything in the Rig Veda relating to the story, ritual, or forms of worship mentioned in the Saptashati. But if we look into the spirit and substance of the Vedic hymn, we do find for the first time, also for the last time in the Rig Veda, thought and spirit and Mantra-force vying with one another in revealing and making felt the Divine afflatus in the Riks of Vak, Ambhrini. For the latter name is patronymic, she the seer, Rishika, being the daughter of Ambhrina. Her name itself is Vak. She sees the revealed truths of the Godhead, finds the inspired word to give expression to them in the shape of this hymn of eight verses. There are many hymns in the tenth Book of the Rig Veda where we find that the name of the seer, Rishi, is also the name of the Devata. This can be explained by the fact that in such hymns the seer is one with the Devata, experiences and lives in conscious union with what he adores; and it is such realisations that account for the identity of names as in the hymns of Vaikuntha, Lava and others. But this is not to say that there are not to be found such realisations recorded in the other Mandalas of the Rig Veda. But there quite often the Rishi's name is addressed in such a way or with a double meaning that it is applicable to the God spoken of in the Rik. There are other seers who speak of their realisations of the supreme Being on the dynamic side and proclaim "I am Manu, I am Surya . . . . " as is to be found in the hymns of Vamadeva in the fourth Mandala. But there the seer's name is retained separately.

Here, in the case of the Devi Sukta, though the seer's realisation of identity with the Supreme Vak, the Creative Word, which in the language of the Tantra is Para Shakti, may account for the identity of the name (Vak as applied to the Rishika as well as to the Devata), it will be more correct to say that the Female Energy of the Supreme Godhead, *parā-devatā*, realising Herself in or choosing the embodiment of Vak Ambhrini, utters the Word, the Mantra. This is at once in consonance with the proclamation made in the Vedic Hymn and the spirit and substance of Saptashati. Let us then close the subject with an English rendering of the famous Hymn[1]—the Devi Sukta, leaving the reader to ponder over the mighty words of 'Vak' and see if it is not in line with the high thought, spirit and purpose of the Durga Saptashati.

अहं रुद्रेभिर्वसुभिश्चराम्यहमादित्यैरुत विश्वदेवैः ।
अहं मित्रावरुणोभा बिभर्म्यहमिन्द्राग्नी अहमश्विनोभा ॥ १ ॥

1. I walk with the Vasus and Rudras, with the Adityas, as also with the All-gods, Vishva Devah.

Mitra and Varuna, both I hold aloft, even so Indra and Agni I do, and the Ashwin-twins too.

अहं सोममाहनसं बिभर्म्यहं त्वष्टारमुत पूषणं भगम् ।
अहं दधामि द्रविणं हविष्मते सुप्राव्ये ३ यजमानाय सुन्वते ॥ २॥

2. I uphold and cherish the Soma that is to be pressed out (for the delight of the Gods) and am the supporter of the Divine sculptor Twashtri, and of Bhaga and Pushan.

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[1] RV. X. 125.

I hold the wealth for the sacrificer who reaches to the Gods the pleasing offerings of Soma and Havis.

अहं राष्ट्री संगमनी वसूनां चिकितुषी प्रथमा यज्ञियानाम् ।
तां मा देवा व्यदधुः पुरुत्रा भूरिस्थात्रां भूर्यावेशयन्तीम् ॥ ३ ॥

3. The Queen, I am the dispenscr of wealth; conscious, I am the first among the Gods (for whom the sacrifice is meant).

Such am I (the One) and the Gods have found me established in the Many, permeating and taking possession of the Manifold (existence).

मया सो अन्नमत्ति यो विपश्यति यः प्राणिति य ई शृणोत्युक्तम् ।
अमन्तवो मां त उप क्षियन्ति श्रुधि श्रुत श्रद्धिवं ते वदामि ॥ ४ ॥

4. It is by Me (by the sole Power) that one eats his food, sees, breathes, and hears what is said.

They that ignore me (with their thought not turned to me) run to ruin. Hear, I declare to thee, the truth of faith, hearken!

अहमेव स्वयमिदं वदामि जुष्टं देवेभिरुत मानुषेभिः ।
यं कामये तं तमुग्रं कृणोमि तं ब्रह्माणं तमृषिं तं सुमेधाम् ॥ ५ ॥

5. Of my own accord, I announce this (truth) which the Gods as well as men strive to reach.

Whomsoever I love, I make him mighty, him a Brahman, him a Rishi, him a man of pure understanding.

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अहं रुद्राय धनुरा तनोमि ब्रह्मद्विषे शरवे हन्तवा उं ।
अहं जनाय समदं कृणोम्यहं द्यावापृथिवी आ विवेश ॥ ६ ॥

6. For Rudra I stretch the bow—for the destruction of the Veda-hater (*brāhma-dvid*). On the people I bestow equal joy in battle and I have permeated Heaven and Earth.

अहं सुवे पितरमस्य मूर्धन्मम योनिरप्स्वन्तः समुद्रे ।
ततो वि तिष्ठे भुवनानु विश्वोतामूं द्यां वर्ष्मणोप स्पृशामि ॥ ७ ॥

7. I gave birth to the Father (Heaven) at the summit of This (creation, Earth), My origin is in the Waters in the Inner Ocean.[1] Thence I extend pervading all the worlds; and yonder Heaven I closely touch and penetrate with the showering and flowing body of mine, *varṣmaṇā*.

अहमेव वात इव प्र वाम्यारभमाणा भुवनानि विश्वा ।
परो दिवा पर एना पृथिव्यैतावती महिना सं बभूव ॥ ८ ॥

8. Like the winds I blow vehemently, myself commencing all the worlds; far beyond the heavens, far (beneath) the Earth—so vast by my largeness I have become.

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[1] Ocean is the image of the Infinite Consciousness and Being—in the conception of the ancients; the word 'inner' before the 'ocean' (*antas-samudra*) here removes the veil over the Truth indicated by Ocean and Waters, *samudra* and *apah*.

DEVI-PUJA

The Worship of Devi

The Universal Festival

There is no festival other than the Dasara that is annually celebrated for ten days with an unsurpassed grandeur and enthusiasm, with religious sentiment and appeal, with the exhibition of the country's skill in craftsmanship and aesthetic creation presented in the shape of art productions and artistic designs adorning India's temples and Mutts and homes in their thousands and millions. All over this subcontinent, over this ancient land of Bharata Varsha, from Kanyakumari to Himachal, from Kamarup to Dwaraka, the several sections of Hindus, whatever their differences in caste, creed or social stratum, share the rejoicings of this countrywide jubilee. They offer their worship in accordance with their domestic practice or communal custom and thus maintain the hoary tradition of laying their offerings at the altar of the Divine Mother, in a temple, in a Mutt or Mandir, in their own homes where a sacred and sanctified quarter is set apart for the purpose or in any other manner in obedience to the promptings of their hearts.

All agree that it is the Divine Mother to whom they pay their homage and offer themselves to Her, invoking Her blessings to shower upon Her children. To the Shaivite, She is is Shiva-Shakti, the Consort of Shiva or the *ardhānga*, the inseparable half, of the very body of the great god, Mahadeva. To the Vaishnavite, She is Sri, the eternal Splendour abiding in the heart of Vishnu, the Supreme Being who maintains the manifestation of this cosmic existence. To the fullblown Shakta* She is the great Goddess, the Mother of all creation, of all the gods and their worlds, who creates, preserves and dissolves, who constitutes and directs all the activities of the Universe. She veils Her own truth—the Absolute Truth beyond—from the vision of Her creatures, gods as well as men, and also by Her own Grace unveils Herself, Her transcendental Truth to their vision and experience for the final beatitude, for crossing the Ignorance, for their liberated and illumined life or for their absorption in Her own Blissful and Absolute Being.

Many are Her names, for many are Her aspects, many Her parts and cosmic functionings. But the one Name by which India has recognised and worshipped Her for untold centuries is Durga—the Goddess whom it is difficult to approach with all the thought-vision, the devotional seeking and yogic efforts of man. She is the Devi whom Arjuna at the bidding of Sri Krishna worshipped on the eve of the Mahabharata war, receiving Her blessing and the boon of victory, confirmed by the assurances of the Lord, as is mentioned in the Bhishma-Parva of the great Epic.

At this distance of time, it is difficult to fix the exact period when the Durga-Puja, the worship of the Divine Mother, began to be celebrated for the first nine nights, *navarātra*, or ten, *dasarā*, of the lunar month of Ashwin. But there is a tradition that Arjuna took back his *gāṇḍiva* and other weapons that were lying asleep during the life *in cognito* of the Pandavas, on the tenth day, *daśami*, of Ashwin at the commencement of Sharat, the autumnal season which, as it progressed, witnessed the great battle of Kurukshetra. Hence, the tenth day that completes the

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* The worshipper of Shakti.

Navaratra Festival of our times is called *Vijayadaśami*, Vijaya being an epithet of Arjuna, the victorious.

Devi-Mahatmya

The sacred text that is most important and universally used in the Worship of Durga especially during the Dasara is called *Devi-Māhātmya*, 'The Glory of the Goddess', or Chandi as it is popularly known in Bengal. It covers thirteen chapters of the Markandeya Purana (Chs. 76-88) containing seven hundred verses, *Saptaśati* and is narrated by the sage Markandeya to Kroshtuki. Though it forms part of a Purana, the Tantras recognise its deserved pre-eminence in the field of sacred literature devoted to the worship of Shakti, the Female Energy or Mother of the Worlds; and in fact, the Katyayani Tantra treats each of the seven hundred verses as a *mantra* mentioning its use in accordance with the formulae prescribed for the elaborate ceremonials in Tantric rites. The *Saptaśati* is held in so much reverence that the very text is worshipped as identical with the Goddess, manifest in its *mantras* or inspired verses. Even on ordinary days, its *pārāyaṇam*, sacred chanting, goes on in many households, for the warding off of evil influences, for the invoking of the blessings of the Devi, for the removal of earthly sufferings or for the attainment of higher and lasting happiness. Always it is the initiate alone who is competent to do the *pārāyaṇam* and others are prohibited.

There are three Charitas or Stories of the Devi contained in these seven hundred verses and the whole *Saptaśati* is read every day, if possible; or one Charita, every day, is read finishing the text in three days, or again in some parts of the country as in Kerala, the reading of the whole text of thirteen chapters is spread over the seven days of the week in the order of 1, 2, 1, 4, 2, 1, 2, chapters beginning every Sunday and completing the text every week; year in and year out this convention is preserved in the code word *pa tho yem vi pra ka rah.*

The three Charitas of the Goddess in the *Devi Māhātmya* are indeed illustrations of the Glory of the three outstanding Personalities and Aspects of the Mother, *viz. Māhākāli, Mahālakṣmi, Mahāsarasvati*; and it is these three that are spoken of respectively in the first, second and third Charitas of the Chandi. The first Charita devoted to Mahakali is complete in the first chapter which commences the story. The second Charita is the story of Mahalakshmi given in the next three Chapters and the third, the story of Mahasarasvati, is given in the remaining chapters of the *Saptaśati.*

The First Charita

Near the hermitage of the sage Medhas in a forest, two persons of ill-luck met, one of whom was a Kshatriya, Suratha by name, and the other Samadhi, a Vaishya. Suratha had lately lost his kingdom as a result of its invasion by another king whose victory was achieved by the intrigue of Suratha's ministers and the disloyalty of his subjects. The Vaishya had his own tale of woe, for he had been a wealthy merchant and was later abandoned, driven out of the house by the members of his own family—by his wife and sons and relatives from their greed of power, wealth and influence. After an exchange of knowledge of their pitiable plight, both of them decided to approach the sage who was living nearby and place before him their difficulties in which there was a common element. After paying their respects to the hermit, they narrated the story of their misfortune and then put this question to the sage. The king spoke:

"Great sage! Though I have lost my kingdom and have nothing now to do with it, my heart still clings to the sense and feeling of 'mine,' *mamatva*, in regard to my former associates, in the ministry and military, officers and subjects. Why should this ego-feeling of 'mine' still persist while there is no justification or truth for its basis? And here is the merchant (pointing to Samadhi) who is no longer required by his relatives who have abandoned him; still he sails in the same boat as I, with his heart clinging to his wife and daughters, sons and relatives, and past associations. What is the mystery? What is the cause of this incorrigible delusion, *moha*, to which we are victims? We are not fools unaware of what is wrong and evil; still knowingly we are drawn by a compelling force to this enchantment of *mamatva*, 'mine.' Is there a cause? Is there a remedy? Deign to come to our rescue, O sage."

The Root Cause

Medhas, the sage, replied, expounding the root cause of all suffering and pointing out the remedy:

"All creatures have a consciousness of their own and are instinct with the desire to preserve themselves and their knowledge is spread over the objects of senses. Of the created beings, some are born day-blind, some night-blind, while others are, day and night, of equal vision. The knowledge of man is in no way better than that of birds and beasts which show great skill in preserving *themselves* and what is *theirs*. Here again, the sense and feeling of 'mine' is spread over all creation—man and beast alike. Know then, the cause of all this is ignorance, *avidyā*, which is not the creation of any being on earth or in heaven. It is a product of the workings of *mahāmāyā*, the great illusory Power of Lord Vishnu. She is the power for bondage as well as for liberation, for ignorance and for knowledge. By Her the whole universe is set in motion revolving incessantly and containing in it all that is mobile and immobile. She, in short, is the Power of Hari, the Lord of the Universe, called *yoga-nidrā*, the Sleep-Power of Yoga or the super-conscious poise of the Supreme Being."

Requested by Suratha to speak more about Her, the sage proceeded:

"Though She is eternal, immanent in the whole universe which is Her embodiment, She takes birth again and again, incarnates Herself in a special form of Her choice for the successful regime of the Gods, *Devas*—for establishing Divine Principles in the world-order so that its functionings may increasingly harmonise with the eternal verities and higher laws of the creative Godhead."

At the close of a former cycle when the cosmos was asleep in the Oceanic Being of its own Cause, and Vishnu, the Lord, also was in his supra-cosmic sleep, *yoga-nidrā*, two Asuras, Madhu and Kaitabha were born of the ear-dirt of the Lord and tried to kill Brahma, the creator residing in the *navel-lotus* of Hari. Upon this, Brahma sought the grace of the goddess of Sleep lodged in the Lord's eyes and sang the praises of the Devi. In response, Mahakali, the terrible ruler of the Night, the pitch Dark, *tamasi rātri*, granted Brahma's prayer in rousing Vishnu from the sleep and caused the destruction of the two Asuras: this is how She came to be titled *Madhu-Kaitabha-Nāśini*. Thus ends the first Charita, the story of Mahakali who is the Goddess presiding over the Divine *tamas*.

The Second Charita

In the second Charita of the Devi, Medhas the sage narrates the story of Mahalakshmi. Mahishasura, the buffalo-faced demon, as a result of his mother Diti's austerities and penance, was born powerful, growing impetuous and endowed with a world-shaking passion for power over the gods. Conquering the gods, he established his power in heaven. The vanquished gods headed by Brahma approached Shiva and Vishnu for consultation. When the latter learnt of the plight of the gods, they got so much enraged that their wrath emitted fire; powerful lights of splendour emanated from the bodies of Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Indra and other gods, forming into a vast mass of Light that took the shape of a woman whose radiant effulgence filled the three worlds. The forceful light of each of the gods formed into a particular limb of the woman—her face was shaped by Shiva, hair by Yama, her rounded breasts by Soma, waist by Indra, shoulders by Vishnu and other limbs similarly by other gods. She was also provided with the respective weapons of the gods. This is the Devi, the Goddess Mahalakshmi, who appeared and challenged the Asura with a thundering roar that shook the three worlds. The gods rejoiced when She slew the Asuras with her weapons and got close to Mahishasura and pressing him under Her feet, thrust the trident, *śūla*, into his body. The gods regained their lost kingdom, adored the Devi and sang Her glory. Highly pleased, the Goddess promised to come to the rescue of the gods whenever there was need or they were put to trouble by the asuric forces, the demons.

Thus ends the second Charita, the story of *Mahiṣāsuramardini*, the title of Mahalakshmi, the Goddess who presides over Rajas, the cosmic quality and power of all action.

The Third Charita

Then comes the last or *uttama charita*, the best story, of the Mother:

Two brothers, Shumbha and Nishumbha, sons of Sunda and Upasunda, the well-known Asuras of the house of the demon Hiranyakashipu, were engaged in severe austerities from their very boyhood and by the sheer force of their *tapas*, succeeded in getting audience of Brahma, who granted them all their desires in addition to the boon (at their own request) that they would not meet death at the hands of gods or men except at the instance of a *kanyā*, a virgin, who was not born of a mother's womb, *ayonijā*. Then puffed up with pride and power, the brothers challenged Indra, took away his rights and privileges enjoyed in *yajnas*, sacrifices, displaced him from his position as king of the gods, established their rule everywhere, enjoying the rights and positions of the Devas. The gods assembled and remembering the promise of the Devi to come to their help when needed, went to the Himalayas and offered their prayers to Her in their distress, invoking Her presence and help.

The Mother was moved. She made Her appearance before them in a very attractive form, at once luminous, charming and graceful. The Asuras were there, the leaders, messengers and the party of the demon king Shumbha; they were infatuated by the melting beauty of Her form and made overtures to Her to become the spouse of their king. Many generals were sent for the purpose, but no one returned with his life. Among the most important generals that were playfully done away with by the Mother, Dhoomralochana was the first. Next came the turn of Chanda and Munda, two generals who met their fate at the hands of the laughing Mother, who is therefore called Chamunda. Then came to the field Raktabija who was so called because every drop of his blood touching the ground would produce an Asura, a fighter equal to him. But without allowing a drop of blood to fall on earth, the Mother finished with him. Then last came in person Shumbha and Nishumbha who attacked the Devi in vain, and were struck down by Her.

It is to be noted that Her encounter with Shumbha was preceded by the destruction of his brother Nishumbha, who embraced the fate of millions of the Asura forces that were all dealt with by the 'Little Mothers', *mātṛikas*, who were emanations and *vibhūtis* of the great Mother who at last called back and gathered all these powers and Mother-Personalities into Her own Body and killed the demon-king Shumbha, taking up his challenge to fight with him single-handed. Virile and vehement in Her attacks, She is referred to as Chandi or Chandika.

The *Saptaṣati* is full of descriptions and details, and of names of weapons and of Asuras and Devi-Murtis.

When the work of the Devi was finished, the gods adored Her and chanted many hymns in praise of her prowess, of Her many manifestations and of Her motherly heart. The Goddess was pleased and once again gave Her word of assurance to stand by the side of the gods in times of need and stress, and also declared that She would ever be present in places where these hymns were read and used in prayers. Finally the Devi spoke of Her future incarnations.

This is the story of Mahasarasvati (called *Shumbha-damani*), the Goddess who presides over *sattva*, the balancing quality of universal Calm amidst all activity and tribulations of external nature or in the inner existence.

Conclusion of the Devi-Mahatmya

Hearing the greatness of the Divine Mother as expounded by the sage Medhas and revealed in those stories of Her three great personalities of Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasarasvati, the king and the merchant were convinced that nothing was impossible for the Supreme Goddess and decided to worship Her and become the recipients of Her gracious blessing. Receiving instructions from the sage as to the method and secret of worship, they retired to the solitudes of the forest, and lived an austere life for three years, fully engaged in *tapas* using for *japa*,* the Mantras of the famous Vedic Hymn, the Devi Sukta of the RigVeda—*devi-sūktam param japan*. At the close of the three years, Chandika, the Goddess who is the upholder of the world, Jagaddhatri, appeared before them, expressed Her pleasure to grant them their desired ends. By the boon he got, the king regained his lost kingdom and in the next birth, he became the *Sāvarṇi Manu* with his unfailing regime throughout the cycle of time named after him, *Sāvarṇi Manvāntara.*

At his own request Samadhi, the merchant, received from the Divine Mother that knowledge by which real detachment from worldly objects and desires is effected and the sense of 'I' and 'mine' is dissolved into the ever blissful state of consciousness of the Divine, the Supreme Truth, the Absolute.

This is the gist of *Saptaśati*, the *Devi-Māhātmya*, the closing chapter of which recounts the good, worldly and other-worldly, that accrues to the benefit of those that perform the Durga Puja, especially in the beginning of *sarat*, the Autumn, and chant in their prayers the hymns addressed by the gods in their invocations of Chandi.

Personal Features

An account of the *Devi-Māhātmya* will be incomplete without mention made of the distinguishing personal features of the three main *mūrtis* of the Divine Mother, for purposes of worship by the devotees. There are ten chapters in the *Mārkaṇdeya Purāṇa* following the *Saptaśati* (serving the purpose of a supplement to it) in which the sage Medhas gives details of worship and descriptions of the personalities, emanations and *vibhūtis* of the Mother. The Mantras (mystic syllables), Tantras (rituals), Yantras (diagrams of occult significance) are also spoken of in addition to the account given of the Trinity, *trimūrti*, both on the Purusha (male) side and on the side of Shakti (Female Energy).

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* Repetition of a mantra in an inaudible voice.

The origin, function and purpose of some of the *vibhutis* and embodied Powers of the Mother and method of their worship are also described, as also the past and future Avataras or incarnations of the Devi.

Mahakali is distinguished by Her ten faces (three-eyed faces), ten hands and ten feet—She is *daśabhujā*, Kali, blue stone colour; it is She who was invoked to rouse Mahavishnu to tackle the dark and pervert activities of Madhu and Kaitabha, hostile to the cosmic manifestation of the Lord.

In Her ten hands she holds these—sword, arrows, club, trident, conch, a weapon called *bhusundi*, bow, a head from which blood is flowing.

Mahalakshmi: She is known by her eighteen arms, *aṣṭādaśabhujā*. Her eighteen hands hold in each of them the following: rosary, lotus, arrows, sword, thunderbolt, club, the *sudarśana* discus, trident, hatchet, conch, bell, rope, iron spear, stick, shield, bow, drinking vessel, water-pot. Under Her feet is Mahishasura. She is the Goddess who shaped Herself into being out of the massed light and collective force of all the Devas. Hence She has in Her all the three qualities (Sattva, Rajas, Tamas) that dominate the world-existence. *triguṇā sā mahālakṣmi sākṣān mahiṣa-mardini.*

Her face and breast are white, waist and feet are red, her shoulders blue and so on. These colours indicate the aforesaid *guṇas* of the Mother. But generally she is described as *pravāḷa-prabhā*, She whose radiance is of the colour of coral. This is to denote that *rajas* is Hers, even as Kali is *tamoguṇā*. Mahalakshmi is seated on a lotus.

Mahasarasvati: This is the Devi who is recognised by Her eight arms, *aṣṭabhujā*, which hold in them bow, arrow, conch, discus, bell, plough, pestle, trident. The light of her body is white resembling that of the moon after the rains when the sky is cloudfree. *ghanānta-vilasat sitamṣu-tulya-prabhā*.

These characteristics of the three embodiments, *mūrtis*, of the Mother (especially the ten, eighteen and eight hands) are enough to enable one to identify the particular Idol that we find installed in temple for the Mother-worship. As has been already noted, this mention is made conforming to the text in the Markandeya Purana which is the great authority for the Chandi school of tantric thought in the matter of Mother-worship. The names of Kali, Lakshmi, Sarasvati of the Chandi-Mahatmya should not be confounded with the same mentioned in the Tantras or Puranas; for the Mantras, Tantras, rituals, *the very mūrtis*, and their special modes of worship often differ. The Chandi does not come under the category of the well-known *Daśa-Mahāvidyās*—Kali, Tara, Kamala, Tripura-Bhairavi, Chhinna-masta, Bagalamukhi and the rest, each of which is a 'great science and art' of approaching the Divine Mother of the Universe for help that She may carry the devotee across the ocean of ignorance and mortality to the supreme Light immortal, the final destination. In the worship of Chandi, great prominence is given to the *pārāyaṇam* of *saptaśati* which is much more important than the Japa of the Chandi Mantra.

Rituals form such a great part of the tantric worship that accounts for the popular belief that there is no tantric worship without ritual. External worship can never be dissociated from some form of ceremony, whether it is the

Vedic worship of sacrifice for the Vedic gods or the Agamic worship of Shiva or Vishnu in the temples. But the Shakti-cult (the tantric) is looked down upon by the other cults as something very despicable. Why? Certain elements feature in its rituals which are undoubtedly the outcome of the moral and spiritual degradation of those who take to the cult with their unregenerated nature fed by intemperance and sexual indulgence. But there is a higher side of the Tantra, of the Mother-cult, which should be sufficient to put the critical mind on guard that it may refrain from condemning the whole method of the tantric worship because of its perversion by the depraved and the degenerate.

As for the *murti-pūjā* idol-worship, which forms an important part of that 'many-sided and synthetic whole which we call Hinduism', a defence or justification is no longer necessary. A more decisive and weighty pronouncement on the subject is hard to find than a few sentences culled from the old writings of Sri Aurobindo in regard to idol-worship and the forms and colours of the God or Goddess worshipped as mentioned in the Tantras. After stating that the tantric worship and discipline provides for the worship of the formed and the formless and for many stages of the aspirants, he proceeds: "How can the Formless invest Himself with Form, asks the religious rationalist. The universe is there to reply. Hinduism worships Narayana in the stone, the tree, the animal, the human being. That which the intellectual and spiritual pride or severity of other religions scorn, it makes its pride and turns into its own form of logical severity. Stocks and stones, the quadruped and the human being, all these are equals in God, our brothers in the Divine, forms that the Omnipresent has not disdained to assume. But beyond the material forms there are others that are ideal and symbolic, but not less, if anything more real, more full of divine power than any actual physical manifestation. These are the mental images in which we worship God."

Again, "If there is a consciousness in the universe and transcending it which answers to the yearning of these creatures and perhaps Itself yearns towards them, then it is idle to suppose that It would assume or create for Its own pleasure and glory the forms of the universe, but would disdain as an offence to Its dignity or purity those which the love of the worshipper offers to It and which after all Itself has formed in his heart or his imagination. To these mental forms, mental worship may be offered and this is the higher way; or we may give the material foundation, the *pratiṣṭhā*, of a statue or a pictured image to form a physical nodus for a physical act of worship."

In the same connection, finally he remarks: "In our human ignorance, with our mental passion for degrees and distinctions, for superiorities and exclusions, we thus grade these things and say that this is superior, that is for ignorant and inferior souls. Do we know? The theist looks down with reprobation on the form-adoring, man worshipping idolator and polytheist; the Advaitin looks down with a calm and tolerant indulgence on the ignorance of the quality-adoring personality-bemused Theist."

Here is the conclusive statement: "It seems to us that God scorns nothing, that the Soul of all things may take as much delight in the prayer of a little child or the offering of a flower or a leaf before a pictured image as in the philosopher's leap from the summit of thought into the indefinable and unknowable and that he does best who can rise and widen into the shoreless realisation and yet keep the heart of a little child and the capacity of the seer of forms."

We have come to the end; and here we offer our meed of praise* to the Devi in the language of the Tantra:

The cause and Mother of the world,
She whose form is that of the Shabdabrahman,
And whose substance is bliss,

Thou art the primordial One,
Mother of countless creatures,
Creatrix of the bodies of the lotus-born, Vishnu and Shiva,
Who creates, preserves and destroys the worlds.

Although Thou art the primordial cause of the world,
Yet art Thou ever youthful.
Although Thou art the Daughter of the Mountain-King,
Yet art Thou full of tenderness.

Although Thou art the Mother of the Vedas,
Yet they cannot describe Thee,
Although men must meditate upon Thee,
Yet cannot their mind comprehend Thee.

The "opening is full of the supreme meaning of the great Devi symbol, its close is an entire self-abandonment to the adoration of the body of the Mother. This catholicity is typical of the whole tantric system, which is in its aspiration one of the greatest attempts yet made to embrace the whole of God manifested and unmanifested in the adoration, self-discipline and knowledge of a single soul."—(*Sri Aurobindo*).

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*From a hymn in the *Tantrasāra* (Translated by Arthur Avalon).

PRATISHTHĀ (INSTALLATION)

(In the Light of His Wisdom)

SALUTATION to Sri Aurobindo, to the Master who has just left the body, but has kept here the light he ensouled in incessant radiation for the fulfilment of his proclaimed mission.

We need not consider here the question of the grand Idea, the sublime Truth, he embodied; nor need we dwell on his achievement in the realm of the Spirit and its sequence that intimately concerns us, or its bearings on the aspiring soul of man in general. That is a subject that directly relates to the core of the Master's Personality which we keep aside for the present. But there are certain luminous sides of his central grandeur which have found expression in the colossal edifice of his *literary* products. They shed the same light of wisdom everywhere in the diverse branches of Knowledge handled by him. Whatever the subject, Art or Poetry, Philosophy or Religion, Politics or Social Science, we find the same light illumining contents, the same wisdom elevating us to take a fuller view of the horizons of the concerned realm of the subject and thus enrich ourselves in the mind's dimensions or regions of the soul. It is in the light of this wisdom that we propose to study one aspect of the tantric path which is an important element, the soul-principle, so to say, of image-worship. We leave aside for the present the synthetic character of the Tantric Yoga and inner worship to which attention has been drawn earlier. Here we confine ourselves to a single limb of the tantric worship and make an attempt at elucidating the underlying principles on which the whole structure of ceremonial worship is based. Here we must bear in mind the value and necessity that the Tantriks have discovered for the dedication of the whole man to the Godhead, the Mother of the Universe, with the material body for the pedestal. The significance of the body as the temple is quite often stressed, so much in detail that every part is considered to be the abode of particular Gods and Goddesses, the aides of the Supreme, the higher Powers in the Cosmos, while the central spot is the lodgement of the Supreme. Hence an all-round purification of the body as the sacred temple is emphasised and many devices are resorted to, including at times material means for keeping the physique intact and fit for arduous discipline, *tapasyā*, by which alone one can have control over the forces that are adverse to the progress and success of the Sadhana. Hence also, the Tantra deems it essential to inculcate the doctrine that no worship of the Deity is complete without the worship of the Deity's body in a material image—an idol or a picture or some symbol in the physical world.

Here it may be stated that the outer symbol of worship is considered an indispensable object of adoration by the tantric devotee to whom it is not a mere symbol. The image, the idol is a consecrated object, vivid in a subtle manner, is charged with the presence or power of the Deity whose Grace is invoked, and this is so especially when properly installed by an adept, or with the help of an expert guide, *ācāryā*. A fuller expression of devotion involves the worship of the body of the Deity as well as the maintenance of purity and holiness in the body of the worshipper. This is the position of the Tantrik in regard to the external aspect of worship.

An incident may be cited here in this context, which will be of much interest to the seeker and devotee who may discover his own explanation of the matter, as explanations are always conditioned by one's culture and temperament, general disposition and equipment for understanding things that are supernormal. It is now more than forty years. A young man in his early twenties witnessed an unusual way of worship conducted in the house of an elderly Tantric devotee. The latter was a friend of the youth's father; so, with due respect he had earlier spoken to him of his doubts about the validity of such worship, *bāhya pūjā*. The gentleman was a strictly orthodox Vaidik Brahmin, a Sanskrit scholar specialised in Nyaya, a Pundit employed in a Government College and so had a secure means of supporting his small family and keeping it above wants. He had ample leisure as the hours of his teaching work in the college were few. He devoted the rest of his time for religious purposes, with special devotion to the Right-Hand worship, *dakṣiṇa ācāra* of the Tantric way. He was no magician of a low sort. This much has to be said in order to enable the reader to get into the spirit of the man's daily performance of worship.

When the youth had finished what he had to say about the *mantrajapa*, the Pundit looked at him for a while and then said, "You say that you have done this mantra and that and have observed the rules according to the Shastra and even though you were properly initiated while quite young and did repeat many lakhs of these mantras, you have not found the results as stated in the books. Well, I am sufficiently old, you are my old intimate friend's son; I take the liberty of speaking to you about certain things in my life, for that may be of some use to you. I too, when young, was like you initiated in *Sri Vidyā* by my father, and have continued it to this day, and would continue even to the end of my life whether or not I see the result as spoken of in the Shastras. Such has been my faith all along. But something happened a few years ago which gave a definite turn to my line of Sadhana and worship." Here he paused and then spoke with feeling; "One day I was reciting verses in praise of the Great Goddess and felt intensely, saying to myself, 'O Mother, I have been Thy worshipper all these years, I know no other God than Thee, Thou hast not vouchsafed to me Thy favour, Thou dost not reveal Thy presence to me in any way.' This feeling lasted for some time and though the intensity slowly thinned, the attitude was there. But nothing happened in response to my cry. A few days later, one night I had a dream. I could not retain it when I got up; but there was a feeling that it was a curious dream in which some one said, 'You will see what happens in two or three days. Accept it, worship it.' There was something more and clear but I could not recollect it, I did not pay to this interesting occurrence as much attention as it deserved. But, two or three days later, quite unexpectedly when one evening a man appeared before me and spoke a few words, the whole dream came to my vision in a trice. He placed a *daṇḍa* (a rod) covered with a cloth, and said 'Now, I go. You will do as directed; all your difficulties vanish from now on.'

"Now it was eventide; I thought I might begin the Puja then itself. Since then I have been doing it, quietly. If you want, you can stay a little longer. I am coming." So saying, he went in and took his bath, and was preparing to start the worship that day. Before the commencement he said: "When the Puja is over, I will be silent for some time. You can receive the *prasād* and go home. And if you want you can come any other day. You may be struck with wonder and may have to think about what you are going to witness at the Puja time. I tell you one thing beforehand;

the *daṇḍa* is the divine weapon of Subrahmanya, Kumara, Son of Devi; its worship is the worship of its wielder, i.e., Skanda. It is the command of the Devi whom I worshipped all my life that I should worship her child and achieve the fulfilment of my life. I have a reasoning mind, I am a *tārkika*, logician, I know that learned people in their wisdom ridicule outer worship as a thing meant for the beginners or fools. It is not for others' good opinion, praise or applause that God has given us life. Inner worship is certainly essential, it leads more to Yoga and Jnana. Outer worship intensifies devotion and is powerful and effective and supplements one's Sadhana. At present I care more for outer worship, I see the presence of Kumara in the Danda. You too will see now. More about this some other time. It is getting late. I shall start. Remember what I have spoken to you. Do not look down upon external worship. It is effective, when there is the proper Installation, *pratiṣṭhā*. God bless you." Instantly the Puja began, there were one or two people, assisting him to burn incense and bring the necessary vessels of which a glittering brass or bronze plate was the most important, for in the centre of that plate he was to place the object of his worship with small idols, representing gods and goddesses, *parivāras* who surround their chief, Kumara, the *pradhānā devata*. In a low voice uttering *mantras* he took the Danda and muttered a *mantra* somewhat inaudibly; he was motionless, holding his breath for a while. The observing youth could make out that it was the *mantra* usually used for installation, *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*. The Danda, the rod, was a little less than three feet in height, about half to three-fourths of an inch in diameter at the bottom and more or less the same throughout except at the top where it was a little more thick and circular with a knob at the head on which was engraved some figure. He held the Danda in a perpendicular position with both his hands in the middle, or a little above the middle. He held it in silence with eyes closed for a few minutes and muttered something removing his hands. As he did it, the Danda, to the amazement of the newcomer, instead of falling, without any support, began to swing pendulum-wise with the knob quite often coming almost half-way to the ground. Slowly the swinging stopped, and the Danda stood erect, quite steady and fixed of its own accord. The Puja began, with the sacramental bath, *abhiṣeka*, to the deity, the *daṇḍa*, and with other usual ceremonial details. When the worship was over the youth recieved the *prasād* in silence and left the house as previously advised by the Shastri.

The youth thought: "Is there any mechanical device which makes the stick stand in the middle of the plate erect without support? Everything was done in my presence. The Shastri is a sincere man, quite genuine in his speech and action. Can it be after all that there is something in the *pratiṣṭhā mantra* which is the means of instilling some force into the inanimate thing? But I have done the same *mantra* many times before and have experienced nothing of the kind. But the man had earlier spoken of certain preliminaries as requisite to realise the efficacy of these *mantras*." Thus a hundred and one thoughts crossed his mind on his way home. But somehow he did not meet the Tantrik again for he was led to owe allegiance to other worthies until in his middle age an obliging Destiny led him finally to take refuge at the feet of Sri Aurobindo.

To return to the subject of outer worship: even for the external worship in the Tantric system, a certain inner purity is considered necessary. Where this is not possible, some one who has it and has achieved and seen some tangible results enabling him to guide the worship, has to do the *pratiṣṭhā* of the Image or *yantra*, the symbolic mystic Diagram in which the presence of the Devata is invoked to be vivid and felt by the worshipper. Once it is done, it is to be tended in a devotional atmosphere which grows in intensity in the course of time. And this is applicable not only to the personal worship of an individual, but also to centres of public worship, such as temples and other *pīṭhas*, seats of spiritual power.

Here it must be noted that there is a distinction to be drawn between the *pratiṣṭhā* of a *mūrti*, an image, or a *yantra* for the personal worship of an individual and that for the public worship in a temple. In the former instance according to the Tantra Shastra, a novice is guided by a genuine priest for external worship but the *upāsaka*, the worshipper himself must prepare in course of time to call down the presence of the deity; for this purpose he has to undergo preliminary disciplines into which many elements enter; of these what is called *bhūta-śuddhi* is the most important and even indispensable both for the outer worship as well as for the *mantra-sādhanā* which leads to the inner life. The literal meaning of the term is the "purification of the elements"; but its effect is to cleanse the atmosphere in and around the person of the worshipper and clear it of the influences of the elemental forces or beings, the lower spirits, the blind unintelligent forces to which men in their ordinary lives are subject; the weaknesses on the mental or moral plane that pertain to the material body of man are indeed the result of the play of these forces of universal nature. The loosening and ultimate riddance of the tamasic forces of the dense and elemental nature is indeed *sine qua non* for qualifying oneself for the *mantra-sādhanā* that aims high at contacting the deity in the deeper layers of one's consciousness or on the higher levels of one's being that are supra-physical. But it is also necessary and to some extent possible in the case of a beginner preparing for the external worship, *bāhya-pūjā*. For without the *bhūta-śuddhi*, the *prāṇa pratiṣṭhā* could not be done, since the latter is meant to evoke the presence or power of the deity from the spirit of one's own being which itself is lodged in, and is a portion of the supreme Self *parama ātman*, the indwelling Godhead in all creatures. In fact, the Tantric works everywhere reiterate the value and necessity of this purification without which the *pratiṣṭhā*, the installing of the power and the presence either within oneself in the inner worship, or instilling the spirit and power into the image or symbol in the outer worship is not possible. The outer worship, as is done commonly by the generality of devotees will be ineffective without the essential *pratishthā* on which everything else depends.

We shall return to the subject of *pratiṣṭhā* after we have done with one or two points in regard to the *bhūta-śuddhi*. Its basic importance in the *mantra-sādhanā* cannot be too much emphasised, since in the yogic path of the Tantrik it affords the foundation on which the whole edifice of Yoga is raised, with devotion, knowledge and will as its constituent elements. But even before entering straight into the inner apartments of Yoga where the psycho-physical centres are concentrated upon and opened for progress in the Sadhana and building the inner life, the Tantric beginner devoted to his chosen deity is advised to effect the *bhūta-śuddhi* without which the presence of the deity cannot be felt, and the grace of the deity, even when it comes in response to an ardent call of the *upāsaka*, worshipper, or a fervent emotional appeal to the deity, cannot be properly received or even when received be adequately held and effectively retained in the vessel, the body. Hence its importance and its value are recognised for any form of serious worship. It must be noted here, that the purification of the

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various limbs, outer physical and the inner mind-stuff, aims not only at the eradication of the narrowing and obscuring influences of the elemental forces and the universal weakness of the lower Nature, but inviting in their place the opposite good influences of the benign forces, the powers of the supraphysical worlds. That is why in the actual *bhūta-śuddhi* every part is offered to a deity, and the group of deities that are invoked to occupy their places in the body-vessel, *ādhāra*, constitutes indeed the minor gods who are the *parivāras* of the chosen Chief, *pradhāna*. In some Tantric works, instead of the minor gods and the Chief Deity, the *tattwas* or cosmic principles with the soul, and the Supreme Self for the Chief Deity are mentioned in the culmination of the *bhūta-śuddhi*. And this is to give a pure spiritual turn with a philosophic basis to the *upāsanā*. As the space set for this short study precludes the citation of these texts which are numerous and well-known, at least one well-known authority like the *Meru Tantra* may be mentioned here in this context. Here is an English rendering:

" When the body in its entirety becomes fit to commune with the Devata, one must restore and fix in their proper place the principles, *tattwas*, hidden in the self. (For this purpose) from the heart-lotus one must bring out the soul from the supreme self. And according to the rule (method) by means of the Hamsa Mantra one has to look upon the body as a luminous form of light and as having become quite competent for the worship of the Deity."[1]

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[1] संजाते सकले देहे देवतोपासनक्षमे ।
आत्मलीनानि तत्वानि स्वस्थानि प्रापयेत्ततः ॥
आत्मानं हृदयाम्भोजादानयेत् परमात्मनः ।
हंसमन्त्रेण विधिवत् तेजोरूपम् कलेवरम् ॥
देवतोपासने योग्यमुत्पन्नमिति भावयेत् ।

This is just an instance out of many to show that the conception of the Tantrik in regard to the body was so complete and ideal that all the *tattwas* (or the higher powers) are understood to be lodged in it and the supreme Godhead abides in the centre and depths of one's being, the heart-lotus. Nor is the purification of the body and preparing it for Divine worship achieved by sheer physical purity and strength to be decided by medical opinion and judged according to hygienic standards. For the purity of the kind in the body is to be accomplished in such a manner that the god or gods could discover in it their actual temple consecrated for their advent or manifestation. And indeed the body is the field of battle between the dark and the luminous forces in the Cosmos, engendering bad will and good will with their brood of feelings and ideas and their consequent subtle effect on the body, nerves and muscles, in the shape of ill-health and good health and general disharmony running riot in the system. Thus the *bhūta-śuddhi* has a double function, the negative and the positive, the former paving the way by the clearance of the disagreeable forces for the positive side, i.e., the filling of the purified parts by the presence of the Powers that are invoked to occupy their right places in the system.

While this *śuddhi* is the real factor that effectuates the *mantra-sādhanā* and the principle underlying the inner worship of any deity, not to speak of the yogic way leading to the opening of the centres, *cakras*, it is necessary also for *bāhya pūjā* to be effective. A word about the chief means employed for this fundamental purification by the Tantrik must be stated here.

Apart from a certain refinement in the course of one's conduct in life involving the elevation of mental and moral sides which are generally held incumbent on the initiate, the main instrumentation is as a matter of course, the *mantra*, the sound-symbol of the deity. It is sound-expression of the idea that at once veils to the gross sight and reveals to the inner eye of vision the body of the deity, of the truth to be realised. And this truth, the Devata, dwells in the subtler worlds, in the higher planes, not on the physical level, in the world of the senses. Hence the repetition of the sacred word, the *mantra*, prepares the being to be collected, composed, and concentrated on the single will to achieve the object of the worship, the Grace of the Deity, to feel and perceive and commune with the Presence. But a mere mechanical repetition runs in a futile circle. For the *mantra* to be potent, the guide's help, i.e., the Guru's initiating capacity counts much. For he awakens the latent faculties in the disciple. This is the secret of the *mantra-sādhāna*. The Tantric scriptures discourse upon the qualifications of a disciple and the qualities of a competent Guru on which we need not dilate here. Sri Aurobindo expounds the rationale of the *mantra-japa* in the light of yogic psychology and experience to which attention may be drawn here: "The word is a sound-expression of the idea. In the supra-physical plane when an idea has to be realised, one can by repeating the word-expression of it, produce vibrations which prepare the mind for the realisation of the idea. That is the principle of the *mantras* and of *japa*. One repeats the name of the Divine and the vibrations created in the consciousness prepare the realisation of the Divine."

We have stated this much about the *mantra* as a means for effecting the purification of the elements as a preliminary, most important for the *sādhanā* and inner worship in the Tantric path, and generally recommended for the outer worship also, though here the worshipper has to rely entirely upon an unshakable faith reinforcing his devotion. As has been already stated, the material object of worship is often an image or occasionally the *Yantra*, for instance, the famous *Sri Cakra* or similar symbols of the dwelling place of the Deity. Here, generally, the presence of the Deity is evoked on behalf of the ordinary worshipper, by an adept, an expert in the field. But this practice has in course of time degenerated into a sort of priestcraft—an unaltered and crude *purohit* muttering the mantras without meaning them, i.e., without caring for a knowledge of the *mantra*, not to speak of the spirit which he is supposed to instill into the image to be worshipped. This is called *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*, the infusing of life and soul into the sacred symbol. Here *prāṇa* really connotes, as in the earlier Upanishads, a conscious-force emanating from the supreme Soul in which the individual being abides. It is an obvious fact that this can be done effectively only by one who is equipped for the task by a successful course of training in the performance of purifying his own being as described earlier. It is only such an adept, a true Acharya who can do the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* of the Image for worship on behalf of another individual. The Tantrik attaches importance to worship because he recognises that devotion to God cannot be complete without laying one's body in full offering at the service of the Deity whose presence is evoked and installed in the image. The famous nine limbs[1] of devotion of the Vaishnava are applicable to devotees of other cults also and the Tantric path, being in essence synthetic in character, incorporates into it among other things, the elements of knowledge and devotion, and discovers the value of bodily service to the Deity. And in the words of the Master, if the external worship is done 'with the true consciousness, it can bring the greatest possible completeness to the adoration by allowing the body and the most external consciousness to share in the spirit and act of worship.'

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[1] Hearing of the name of God, singing His glory, constant remembrance, worship of His feet, worship with flowers, adoration, service, friendship, and last self-offering.

श्रवणं कीर्तनं विष्णोः स्मरणं पादसेवनम् । अर्चनं वन्दनं दास्यं
सख्यं आत्मनिवेदनम् ॥

So far about the personal image-worship by an individual devotee the efficacy of which is certainly conditioned by his faith and devotion. Here we may proceed to consider the question of *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* of the image meant for public worship such as that in temples, and also the subtle and occult principles underlying the traditional belief in worship at what is generally believed to be holy places, not necessarily or invariably temples where images are installed. In this connection we may recall to our mind what Sri Aurobindo states in his usual assured tone in mentioning the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*, the essentials of which he puts in a nutshell in the following passage in a letter to a disciple. Let us quote the letter[1] as it is of inestimable value for our purpose:

"What you say is no doubt true, but it is better not to take away the support that may still be there for the faith of those who need such supports. These visions and images and ceremonies are meant for that. It is a spiritual principle not to take away any faith or support of faith, unless the persons who have it are able to replace it by something larger and more complete.

"If the *prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā* brings down a powerful Presence, that may remain there long after the one who has brought it has left his body. Usually it is maintained by the bhakti of the officiant and the sincerity of belief and worship of those who come to the temple for adoration. If these fail, there is likely to be a withdrawal of the Presence."

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[1] Published in the *Letters Officiant*.

The Image installed is just a support for the external worship, for the satisfaction of and a steadying influence upon outer mind and being; the real and substantial element is in the Presence or Power so installed by a great soul. But a Siddha, one who has achieved substantial results in the spiritual path need not install an image for the benefit of others. The very spot he lives or lived in becomes charged with an emanation of the presence and power of his holy soul so much so that anyone susceptible to subtle or occult influences can feel and detect the abidance of something non-physical in the physical surroundings of such a place. This accounts for the holiness of places where great sages and seers have lived, stationed in their Tapas-Force, or have shed their mortal frame and mortality.

There is another important aspect of this question of worship at, and pilgrimage to, holy places which may be mentioned here for the benefit of minds that are inclined to believe that any famous place or temple held to be holy and attracting crowds of people from afar and near need not necessarily be holy or exert benign influence or elevate the spiritual side of man. For it is perfectly true that when a presence or power is brought down where the image is installed, it remains a live force for a long time and continues even after the man passes away. Tradition, indeed, nourishes the faith of the people who visit such places for worship. But there are certain temples and other places of worship without an image installed where the power, the presence is not brought down by any holy man and without any tradition to that effect. Still, such places attract large crowds of persons many of whom are convinced by experience of the active presence of a superior Force granting boons to many a worshipper. Here the truth of the matter is that such places are chosen and occupied by beings of a supra-physical world —let us call them beings of the vital world—who exercise their influences from those centres which afford a physical support for contact with the earth and earthly beings. These beings are quite often spirits of a low order whose workings are more easily and palpably felt and certainly in the end injurious to a healthy mind and a soul that has taken to the spiritual way of life. This accounts for the centres of worship which draw numerous people over whom the spirits have a sufficient sway for their own gratification and enjoyment.[1] But there are good, not only evil beings of the vital world, and they too exercise their benign influence over men who come to worship; but such temples or places are less numerous. Thus it will be seen that all temples need not have Images of worship installed by a holy man. There are many which are the self-chosen places of spirits and other beings of the vital world; they bring themselves, and need not be brought down by any one, to places that afford them sufficient support through the desires and passions and other hungers of men which are enough to feed such deities. When the support is withdrawn and men turn to higher forms of worship, they vanish to their native country of the vital world, or roam about in search of a suitable habitat on earth made possible through the prayers rich with greed and other weaknesses of the inviting human beings on earth who are ignorant of what they are doing.

Another point must be noted in regard to the matter of holy places. There are certainly holy spots the origin of which could not be traced with any certainty. But it is intelligible on the basis that in the very formation of this globe, there are certain spots which are conducive for meditation and concentration and they engender a spiritual atmosphere which can be sensed and felt by those who are by nature or training sensitive to subtle and occult influences. It is also on this basis that the Tantra Shastra quite often recommends for its votaries a mountain-top or the bank of a holy river etc., *parvatāgre nadītire*, for *mantra-sādhanā* in solitude.

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[1] My first preceptor Vasishtha Muni it was who acquainted me with these occult truths among others, and years long after, when I came here, I found the Mother's utterances and authentic knowledge of these matters of detail in the occult realm confirmed them.

Such is the value of a holy atmosphere for purposes of spiritual life. But nothing is holier than the name of the Guru, for it carries laden with it the influence and power and the very presence of the Guru, if he is a competent Guru, one of real stature in the realm of the Spirit, say, a perfected soul, a *siddha*, a great Vibhuti of high spiritual force. For in such cases the Guru has done the installation, *praṇā-pratiṣṭhā*, of his very presence in the heart of his disciple whose fidelity to his master is enough to nourish it for its growth and fruition in the receptacle that is the devotee, the *śiṣya*. If the name of the Guru as stated above is holy for the disciple, what is holy beyond measure for all spiritual aspirants and devotees is the spot where such a *siddha* or *vibhūti* or—and this is rare—a Divine Manifestation lives, or lived in *tapasyā*, and shed the coils of mortality —the 'material envelope.'

THE VAK OF THE VEDA AND THE THROB OF THE TANTRA

AMONG the stupendous achievements of the mystics of ancient India stands foremost the Theory of Creation by the Word. The creative Logos of the Greeks does certainly correspond to the *vāk* (Lat. *Vox*, Sans. *vac* to speak) that is the Creatrix of the World. But the Indian conception is distinguished by the Theory and the treatment it has received at the hands of great seers of the Vedic age, the sages and intuitive thinkers of the Upanishads in succession, the philosophers of the Darshanas, the Tantra Shastras and the Puranas. In the long line of sacred and general literature from the Vedas down to our times we find that they have made capital use of the theory of Vak and its practical importance was the one aim towards which all their efforts were directed. The theory of Vak which has permeated the religious literature of the land has influenced to a considerable extent the *belles lettres* of later ages as exemplified in the utterances of Kalidasa and Bhavabuti. While the former affirms Vak as Shakti, power, that cannot be alienated from the meaning, its substance, in the opening verse of his Epic Poem, the latter, Bhavabhuti, makes a profound statement in his dictum that is laden with a world of ideas about the original power of Vak and its real nature on the one hand and on the other hand Vak as vehicle of thought at the disposal of the decent-minded. For he says that speech follows the meaning in the case of the *sādhus* of the world—and they are called *sādhus* who are of a good, well-bred kind with regard to veracity—in effect it comes to mean that at the best, men in the world give a correct expression to the thought in their minds. In contradistinction to this is the other statement that the meaning follows the word in the case of primeval Seers, the Rishis. The intention of the poet here is unmistakable and the idea about the real nature of Vak as transmitted from age to age from the Vedic times is revealed in the pregnant phrase—*vācam artho'nudhāvati*. The Vak of the Rishis is not a sound-symbol of a mental idea vocally expressed as is done by all developed human beings. What else could it be then? Vak, no doubt, is Voice, word or speech. But it is not the Voice or word depending on the mind to express an idea. It is a voice in a deeper sense of the term which is in its source a power of expression, a force which impels the being to respond to the stimulii which are a demand made on the being by the environment or by the subtle or occult and spiritual forces from the deeper layers or higher levels of being.

It is a voice that proceeds from the depths, or from the heights of one's being which is not established in mind, but itself being an early and settled movement for expression is the support of the mind which, comparatively speaking, is a subordinate instrument of expression. Here we have to understand the distinction made by the ancients between the Voice which is the support of the mind and the voice which is speech. The word as vocal expression is sound-symbol of an idea in the mind and naturally has mind for its basis, source and support. In this light the poet's dictum that meaning follows the Rishi's Vak has to be understood; and indeed it is intelligible that the Voice proceeds from the heights or depths of the conscious substance in which the Rishi is stationed and carries with it the meaning to be realised when it finds its completion in the delivery of the utterance. This is how meaning follows the Word in the case of a *seer* and in the case of others word is chosen and adapted to convey the intended meaning.

Now let us enquire into the real character of the Vak that creates, the Vak which, in the words of a Vedic poet, became all these worlds, *vāgeva viśvā bhuvanāni jajñe*. We have clues found in the Rig Veda itself which we can follow with great advantage in our attempt to penetrate into the mysteries of the Word. The oft-quoted famous passage of Dirghatamas helps us a great deal to have an adequate idea of the theory of the Word as Mantra and of human speech as understood by the seers of the Rig Veda. For the seer-poet in stating that there are four steps by which the Word of the Mantra unveils itself has revealed a truth which has a large bearing on the source of the Word itself, as being the abode of the Great Cosmic Powers, the Gods as mentioned in another verse of the same hymn. These two Riks (I. 164-39, 45) announce in plain and unambiguous language as is rarely the wont of these ancient mystics, certain facts of mystic experience which we may reduce to categorical dicta for modern understanding.

1. There is the supernal Ether in the empyrean heights of Being called *paramam vyoma*.

2. It is the abiding place—imperishable and immutable —of the Riks, i.e., the Mantras.

3. All the Gods, the Cosmic Powers also reside there.

4. What can any one do with the Rik who does not know *That* (the Supreme Ether) which is the abode of the Riks as well as of the Gods? That is to say, the Rik has value only when one knows its source, the supreme Ether.

5. There are four steps or planes, *padāni*, from which the Speech issues, the fourth step is the human speech that

is the ordinary word while the other planes are hidden in the secrecy.

6. The Word and the meaning of the Mantra, i.e., the Veda belongs to the higher planes.

7. And the last and important statement is that the Veda is referred to by the Rig Vedic *Seers* themselves as the Word Eternal, *nityā vāk*, a phrase the Rishi applies to the Mantra in the urge for laudation to Agni, *nityayā vācā codasva* (VIII. 64·6).

We can now consider how the essential truths in the statements made above formed the basis of the Upanishads and later Scriptures in dealing with instructions on the character of the Eternal Word of which the Sound-symbol is OM. For it is the nearest representative approach in the mental and vocal expression to the inexpressible fountain-source of all original rhythms of the Supreme Ether. This Ether of the Sublime above is the native Home of the primordial sound-substance of which the Mantras are formations hidden in the higher planes and manifest in their descent to the last step which is the human speech. This Supernal *ākāśa* is the imperishable source and perpetual basis of sonorous rhythms that issue from the heights to form the planes and build the worlds and also to function by casting harmonic spells for their sustenance. It is this Vedic idea and spirit that bristles in the utterance of the Upanishad wherein the Rishi prays to Indra the Lord of Swar, the Divine Power of the Luminous Heaven, whose vibrations of rhythms proceed from that ¡World of the luminous Gods, whose abode, as has been stated, is the self-same Ether, *paramam vyoma*. "He who is the Bull of the Vedas of the universal form, he who was born in the sacred rhythms from the Immortal—may Indra satisfy me through the intelligence, O God, may I become a vessel of the Immortal. May my body be full of vision."[1] This passage, it is evident, keeps close to the Vedic conception of the eternal Word—the Vedas, the rhythms, the Godhead, the Immortal that could be held in the earthly body of man, the body of the Rishi that has to become self-luminous, full of vision, and above all Indra, the Godhead of the Divine Mind as manifested, i.e., born from the sacred rhythms of the Immortal.

One more topic about the four steps of Vak requires elucidation. We can translate the term as planes answering to the steps, *padāni*, used in the Rik. The four steps are taken to be, first, the Material plane, next, the plane of Life-force that penetrates, circumfuses and sustains it, itself remaining above in its station higher than that of the material existence; and the third from here is a plane in which the Mind-principle is dominant and is in relation to the plane of the Life-world, in the same way as the latter is to the world of Matter. If we take the first plane, the material world, as a gross existence, then the second is the subtle and the third is the causal. Giving birth to these three planes, there stands above these three the great Causal, *mahākāraṇa*, in which reside in an undifferentiated state all rhythms of sound to build the worlds and planes, all play of Light to direct the lines of rhythm which are real creators not only of objects of the world severally and in their totality but also manifestations of the Gods in the Cosmos.

The fourfold division of the gross, the subtle, the causal and the Supreme Causal that transcends the three as envisaged here may correspond to similar divisions of other ways of classification that are suited to the practical lines adopted in the various systems of Yoga and their respective philosophies. Commenting on this Rik, Sayana mentions the names of the four steps of Vak using the terminology of the Tantric Yoga. We can explain the significance of those four steps or states in the light of the fourfold division as envisaged above. The Tantriks while admitting the principle of the division, apply it for practical purposes dealing with the subject from a psycho-physical and psycho-spiritual point of view; naturally therefore, since the subtle centres play a vital part in their Yoga they locate the Vak of the states in the nervous system. They name it *parā*, *paśyantī*, *madhyamā* and *vaikharī*. The first and the supreme source—the primordial *parā-vāk* is beyond; it is unmanifest, but turned towards manifestation; it is the great Causal *mahā-kāraṇa*, and as such its centre is at the bottom of the spinal column that supports the nervous system. This bottom is *mūlādhāra*, the root-centre of the physical being. Next is the *paśyantī vāk*, the word that perceives, and this is the causal located in the navel centre; then is the *madhyamā vāk*, the middle, the Word in the intermediate subtle region between the navel and the throat which last is the region for the express speech called *vaikharī vāk*.

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[1] Portion of a Taittiriya passage translated by Sri Aurobindo.

These four states of what may be called the process of sound-formation may or may not have an exact correspondence to the four steps mentioned by the seer in the Rig Veda or to the other lines of classification that is based upon the practical procedure, Yoga, adopted in the different systems. It is not of much importance to reconcile the corresponding divisions as that would cause confusion and minimise the value and importance of certain classifications in preference to others. But what is of great moment to us and is common to all the systems is the fact that the principle of fourfold division has bearing on the states of consciousness, wherein their vibrations are represented in their dynamic aspect by the vibrant word, the expressive sound. While the

Tantric Yoga locates these states in the centres, the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo which takes a Cosmic view of things would consider the four principles as referring not only to the four states of consciousness, but also to the corresponding fields of consciousness and call them the four planes of being. Necessarily then, the Waking consciousness, *jāgrat*, operates in the world of Matter, the Dream consciousness,—not the subconscious dream, but the superconscious Yogic dream, *svapna*,—in the field of the Life-world, and above, next to it, the Yogic Sleep consciousness, *suṣupti*, belongs to the third world from here, the world of the Luminous Divine Mind, the Swar. Above the third is the fourth, *turīya*, that transcends the lower three states of consciousness and planes of being. It is from there the effulgent Rays of the Gods, the Cosmic Powers of the Supreme One, radiate and their rhythms are caught on their way from the Supreme Ether by the *seer*, one who is endowed with the faculty of the revelatory vision or inspirational audience.

It is clear then, that these are all conscious and superconscious states of which in the normal waking state we are not conscious. That we are not conscious is no proof that they are not conscious. It is too late in the day to question the correctness and veracity of utterances of the *seers* who have experienced these truths in the mystic field and bequeathed the same to their posterity. These states and planes are the steps by which the rhythms of the Creative Word, the Vak, descend to the level of the human speech which is called the Mantra, the word of inspiration that expresses in rhythm truths of intuitive vision or direct perception. It goes without saying that it does not apply to all human speech most of which is representative in sound-symbol of ideas in the mind. But it applies most eminently to the Mantras of the Vedic age when language was a living organism acting to the emotional pressure and nervous experience, forces of impulsion, inspirational incitement or revelatory visions. It also applies to some extent to genuine Poetry of all times—not all poetry, but Poetry of the kind in which the poet catches the rhythms in the deeper and subtler layers or on the higher altitudes in their less weakened intensity and vigour before they get much mixed and so thoroughly diluted in the ordinary human level and word-transaction and thought-formation. Indeed it is this fact that accounts for some poets giving utterance to truths of which they themselves were not conscious at the time of their creation and delivery. On this subject of poetical creation and the rhythms, there are precious passages in the writings of Sri Aurobindo and no amount of writing upon it here can touch even a fringe of the matter as dealt with in the authentic utterances of the Master. Whatever the Vedic theory of the Word and the utterances of sages in the literature connected with it including the Brahmanas and the Upanishads be, those who are more familiar only with classical Sanskrit cannot feel quite at home in the earlier scriptures unless they make a special attempt to acquaint themselves with the obsolete words, archaic usage, the thought-content of the hymns in general and the recondite and complex and subtle conception of the graded and Vast existence beyond the material universe expressed in images, figures and symbols. But there is another class of scriptural literature, the Tantric, where the language is easy, the ideas are clearly laid, the substance of the whole matter that is dealt with is given out in a manner that directly goes home to any enquiring mind. Let us see what they state about the true character of the Word reduced to sound, *śabda*, and its utility in all human endeavour for success in life as well as for liberation from the bonds of ignorance leading to the final beatitude.

They start with the dictum that the word-sound has a power inherent in it, and that this power varies with the letter-sounds and a proper use of these word-sounds enables us to realise the truth in or behind the object it refers to. This theory of Tantriks is based upon their first axiom that the Word or sound-creation precedes the creation of objects—Word-sound, *śabda*, first and *artha*, the meaning or object next—*artha-sṛṣteḥ pūrvam śabda-sṛṣtiḥ*. This *śabda* takes the place of the Vak of the Vedic scriptures. It is the first *śabda*, called *nāda*, rhythmic sound that was the first creation, the primordial throb, *ādya spanda*, that proceeds to effect the formation of the universe and create the objects of the world. It is the ancient Vedic theory of Creation, Vak, the Voice of the Bull that roars, *vṛṣabho roraviti*, of the Supreme Truth, the Godhead that is translated into the language of the Tantra, as the supreme and primal throb, the vibrant move of an infinitesimal portion of the Infinite Absolute that measures out and forms and manifests all the worlds and this world and its objects. It is the same word, the sound, the rhythm, *nāda*, that is at work in the formation of tiny things as of colossal objects. The Tantriks discovered and promulgated a series of sound-symbols selected from articulate speech as representing the rhythms that constitute the formations not only of material objects, but of others which are subtle and are of the subtler planes of the Cosmos. Thus the original Word, the Vak, the Voice of Creation which suggests the Eternal syllable of the Veda, OM—or rather AUM—develops in the course of its manifestation into the seed-sounds of the Tantriks, *bīja-akṣaras*, which are charged with the principles of things; and in reality they have their own forms made of rhythms which stand behind the revelations and inspirations that greet the developed and higher faculties even as they compel and build the forms in well-ordered vibrations and move into great Cosmic measures.

The development of this seed-sound theory into very minute details by the Tantriks, with an eye to its utility in their explorations in the occult spheres, has had a far reaching consequence on the practice of *mantra-sādhanā* for dealing with men and things, the elemental forces, and beings of the supraphysical worlds. For the letters, singly and in conjunction with others, represent in their rhythms not only objects; they express the colours and other qualities, actions of different kinds including attraction and repulsion as well as creation and destruction. It must be borne in mind that there are two sides in the effectual process of these seed-sounds for their respective purposes. One is the radical and psychological aspect which carries with it the spirit and thought-vibrations natural to them and the other is the mechanical side that arouses the vibrations of the material energy that is generated in the effort to vocalise and deliver it for the execution of its natural function. This latter aspect can be easier appreciated if we remember what is a common-place of modern Science—that the vibration of sound has the potency, the effectual power to create or destroy forms; but the other, the psychological and spiritual aspect of the sound-vibration requires a closer consideration, for it is not the sound of a drum or the voice of a brute, but the vocal expression of a self-conscious human being. And if we but go a little deeper behind the spoken word into the undelivered word which resides in the mind and consider its real character as related to the desires, passions, sensations and emotions on one side and the thoughts and ideas that belong to the higher mind or the mind proper on the other side, we discover that daily and hourly we produce by the word-sound within us thought-forms and thought-vibrations which result in corresponding vital and physical vibrations, act upon ourselves and others ending in the indirect creation of action and of formation in the physical world. When we learn to appreciate the relation of sound to speech, and also the action of thought-vibrations which are also sound in subtle state that incessantly emanate from us, act and react on others and ourselves in the manner stated above, we would find it easier to understand intelligently the power of the seed-sounds, *bijākṣaras* which represent as approximately as possible in terms of human speech-sound the natural sound-vibrations and orderly rhythms that have built the forms and bodies of the created objects as well as of creative forces to which they apply because of being their natural names in their causal state. The Tantras have discovered their utility in the occult lines of thought by fixing the seed-sound chosen for a particular object in some locus or centre in the nervous system and concentrating on it in a stream of uninterrupted flow of the same i.e., similar vibrations that lead to the realisation of the true meaning in its causal state, or its position and purpose in the scheme of the Cosmic order. Or when this method involves a strenuous yogic effort too much for an ordinary seeker of occult truths, there is another comparatively easier, but none the less effective method that is generally recommended. It is the repetition backed by attention and interest, of the letter or letters to produce the subtle vibrations on the consciousness and thus to prepare it to receive the truth or truths beyond the mind which are evoked by the harmonic rhythms of the letter-sound held in mind through repetition and which are the nearest approaches to the natural rhythms of those truths.

So far we have seen how the mystics of Tantra treat the letters and their sound-rhythms and their real character and value for ends which pertain to life in this world and other worlds. But they do not stop with the occult truths however interesting and useful they may be, they proceed to the Beyond, the Transcendental, for the ultimate goal, the final Beatitude, the Light Eternal which is also the Vedic Ideal. Actuated by a synthetic spirit to include every element of truth that matters and concerns the individual and the universal, *piṇḍāṇḍa* and *brahmāṇḍa*, to use their terminology, they proceed from the subtle meaningful sound-vibrations to their causal and to the great Causal of all causals which issue from the Original Throb which in its native form is Light. That is how they call the Eternal Word of the Veda, AUM as the Radical Light, also as the generator of all seed-sounds *sarva-bīja-utpādaka*, as the source tree of all branches *śākhādiḥ*, and as the constant, steady and inexhaustible and immutable, *dhruva*, *avyaya* and *akṣara*.

Here again the Tantra accepts the theory of Vak in principle, but develops it in its characteristic way for practical purposes.

A word about the Vedic method of using the Vak for purposes of Sadhana is necessary to distinguish it from the Tantric method since we started with the Vedic Vak and entered into some details about the Tantric theory of seed-sounds. It may be asked : how did the Vedic sages apply their theory of Vak to the life of Sadhana, to build the inner life ? It is difficult to enter into this question in detail here. But we can safely, without hesitation, say what can be easily gathered from the hymns of the Rig Veda. One outstanding fact in their manner of approach to the Godhead is that while they were tireless in their effort to commune with the Cosmic Powers, the Gods, and aimed at the Highest, they had for their article of faith the one Cosmic Power of the Godhead nearest to the Earth-plane ; in fact, the presiding King of this world is Agni, the Divine Flame. And Agni has many functions, as the heat of the conscious Force that effects the formation of things in the World of matter and develops his functions in man—for the Gods function in the cosmos as natural powers, and as psychological and spiritual powers in man; and as the human faculties develop in the self-conscious being, he manifests himself as the flame of aspiration that burns out the smoke of desires and passions and impurities, arriving at his fuller manifestation as the Divine Will. In the Vedic scheme the first function of Agni is to voice forth the aspirational call of man for the acceptance by the higher Gods of his being, in all the parts of his being, so that whatever in man belongs to the Cosmic Powers will go to their rightful owners, the Powers of the Godhead, and man may be delivered to his rightful place among the Gods and abide in the Home of Truth.

But that is a higher function of Agni when the higher faculties of the human being are so developed as to enable man for the divine effort of self-exceeding and mounting the higher steps of the ladder of cosmic existence. Even before that, Agni's function begins as the voice in man, *agnir vāg bhūtaḥ*. It is this aspect of Agni that the Vedic sages were initially impressed with and used prayers to evoke him so that he may awake and take up the function of calling the higher Powers. Vak therefore as hymns, prayers addressed to Agni first and to other Gods afterwards, was the main instrument of their spiritual effort. Whatever their personal effort, it was all directed towards the help of the ruling Powers and was subordinate to and aid to self-giving, self-offering of which Vak as prayer was the motor force, rather than concentration and meditation on sacred syllables as is the case with Yogins of later ages including the Tantric way. And the inspired nature of the Vedic Vak tended to attach greater importance to and enhance the value of the sacred utterance and the result was tangible and, comparatively speaking, unfailing as can be seen from a close study of most of the hymns addressed to the Gods in Rig Veda. It is noteworthy that the Seer-poets of the Veda themselves make mention of the efficacy of Vak, the Mantra, quite often expressing their gratitude to the responsive Gods whom they laud with a happy confidence that they are watchful and hear and respond to them in the hour of their need. The potency of the Vedic Vak as prayer lay in the fact that it was an externalised vibrant sound, a perfect reproduction in resonant rhythms of thought-vibrations charged with feelings from the depths of the Seer-poet and others who used it. Vak was the chief means used by the Rishis to awaken the Great God of the Earth, Agni, seated in the heart of man. It is not that the Rishis did not employ means other than prayer,—concentration, *tapasyā*, etc. They were great *tapaswins* and Yogins with a fund of occult Knowledge and vision of spiritual truths all of which were gifts of the awakened Agni guiding the Rishi in his onward journey towards the Home of the Supernal Light. Agni, then, is Vak, the power of expression, the voice of Call, on the physical plane; in his subtler aspect at the back of the voice he is the psychic fire whose flame throws up the force of Aspiration in the march towards the Godhead; radically he is the Godhead himself, his Will secret in the heart of things and of man.

Now we close: we began with Vak as the creatrix, the throb in the Infinite calm that sets into motion the Creation, the manifestation of the worlds in Cosmic measures. It is the primal root-sound represented by OM, of all seed-sounds which are the basic rhythms for the formation of all things in Creation. The word and sound precede the meaning and objects in creation. The four steps of the words are Cosmic steps in their descent into Manifested Existence.

In the Cosmic view these steps are the planes—the great Causal that is above, followed by the causal, the subtle, and the last, gross physical plane. It is the relation of thought-vibration and sound-vibration to speech—subtle or openly expressed—that explains the dynamic character of *mantras* for formation, dissolution and sustenance. Such is the perception of the mystics of ancient India; such the profound conception behind their utterance about the value and potency of Vak; and such also is the grandeur at once subtle and recondite, yet yielding to utility not only for purposes of life here,—though this is subordinated to higher and pure spiritual aims,—but for the highest aim of man endowed with Vak, for his self-exceeding effort to arrive at the most sublime, the Immortal Light which is the Eternal home of all lights and all rhythms, all Gods and all measures of this Cosmic Manifestation.

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TAMIL

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TELUGU

Matru Vakkulu
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